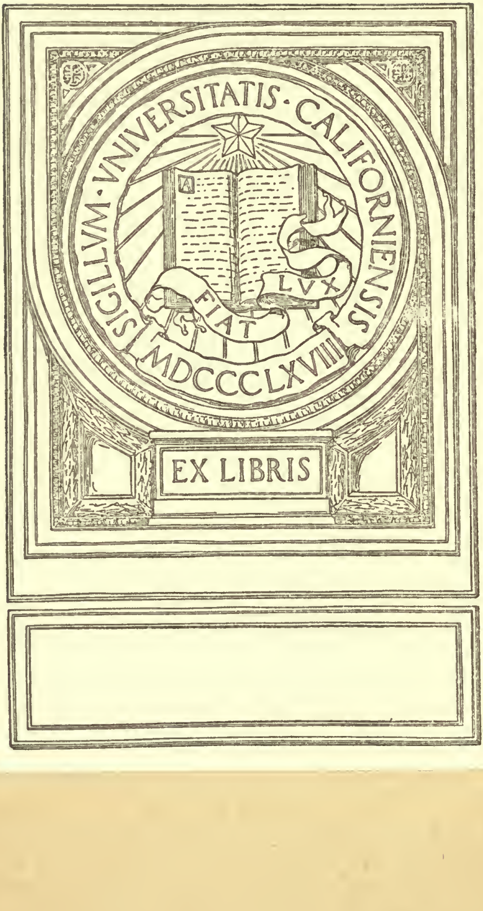
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MAY MARTIN,

AND

OTHER TALES

OF THE

GREEN MOUNTAINS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "GREEN MOUNTAIN BOYS," "LOCKE
AMSDEN," AND "THE RANGERS."

A NEW EDITION,

REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

BOSTON:
BENJAMIN B. MUSSEY AND COMPANY,
29 CORNHILL.
1852.

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[Thompson, Daniel Pierce]

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PREFACE.

THE frequent calls which have latterly been made on the author and his publishers for complete sets of his works has led to the arrangement resulting in the publication of the present volume, in which all the minor productions of his pen that have ever appeared in book form are embraced. The leading tale, May Martin, has been too extensively read in the various mutilated and unauthorized editions which have from time to time appeared, both in this country and Europe, to require any other remark than what will be found in the new introductory chapter prefixed to this edition. The other different tales embraced in the volume were published separately, and at various intervals of time, but in a manner which, in a great measure, precluded any other than a local circulation; and, consequently, they will be new to a great majority of the readers of the author's longer and more important productions. Though relating mostly to matters of a domestic and local character, they are yet all founded on fact, being but illustrations

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of the actual incidents by which they were suggested, with little other variation than what would naturally arise from the introduction of scenery drawn from the locality, the use of dialogue in bringing about the developments, and, perhaps we should add, from the exercise of the license generally conceded to the writers of such tales — that of making such alterations in the grouping of incidents and characters as may be deemed advisable to heighten the interest of the narrative, or add to the effect of the *dénouement.*

The tales have all been thoroughly revised and corrected, and are now submitted to the public to go with the author's more elaborate works, which have been received with such flattering marks of approbation.

THE AUTHOR.

Montpelier, Vt., Feb. 1852.

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MAY MARTIN;

OR,

THE MONEY DIGGERS.

A GREEN MOUNTAIN TALE.

INTRODUCTION TO THE REVISED EDITION.

Since the public have evinced a determination to be pleased with May Martin, with all its imperfections, the author, both in justice to himself and in return for a reception so little anticipated at the time of its hasty composition, has concluded to give this first born of his fancy a new dress, by way of revision and emendation, and at the same time furnish a brief account of the traditions and incidents by which the tale was first suggested.

The tale of May Martin, or the Money Diggers, was composed in the evenings of the month of March, 1835, being commenced, and the greater portion of it written, rather as an agreeable relaxation from the professional labors and studies of the day than with any view to publication. At this juncture, however, the offer of a prize of Fifty Dollars for the best original tale, made by the publishers of the New England Galaxy, coming under the observation of the author, he hastily finished his story and cast it upon the literary waters, where he supposed, like nine tenths of such ventury, it would be heard of no more. But, in happy fulfilment of the adage here alluded to, after many days he found it, by its appearance in the periodical above named, with the award of the prize in question, which it had obtained among numerous competitors. A copyright having been secured, it was then published in book form, a large edition of which was soon exhausted. Since that time, the work has never been published by the author, nor by his consent, nor in consequence of any assignment ever made by him; though the market has been constantly supplied by stolen or unauthorized editions, got up in various parts of the country, and presented without the name of the publishers, and, as might be expected, in a sadly mutilated condition. The publishers of our periodicals, also, have, in numerous instances, given the work to their readers entire, and, as with the book publishers, without thanks, return, or benefit to the author, save the compliment involved in the act — which is, indeed, something, since it is not every work that is worth stealing. And this consideration, together with that of the republication of the tale in London, as a popular work of English production, has induced the author to forego his privilege of grumbling, and let his strayed bantling (which seemed to be doing so well for itself, if not for its owner) go on seeking its fortune without putting in any claim to its earnings, or recalling it for a new outfit.

Having said thus much of the history of the story since its first appearance, I will now proceed to narrate the few incidents with which its origin was connected.

Not many years subsequent to the revolutionary war, a foot traveller of indigent appearance, from some part of Lower Canada, came into one of the western towns of Vermont, and hired himself out to a farmer for a month, to earn money, as he hinted, to be expended in the vicinity, in the prosecution of a special object, the nature of which, with considerable show of mystery, he declined to make known. As soon as he had completed the term of service for which he had engaged, and received his wages, he repaired to a land surveyor, an experienced woodsman, whose acquaintance with the localities of all the neighboring mountains he had previously ascertained, and proposed to hire him as a guide and assistant in exploring the woods for a secret purpose. This purpose, as he now found it necessary to the prosecution of his plan to be somewhat explicit, he declared to be a search for buried treasures, a portion of which, in case of success, was, in addition to ordinary wages, to go to the proposed assistant. And still failing to enlist the surveyor in so hopeless a project as that of searching for treasure buried in so interior a country as Vermont, without strong reasons for believing in its existence in some particular spot, he proceeded, after exacting many promises of secrecy to be observed till after the project should succeed or be abandoned, to relate the following singular story:—

Some time near the close of the French and Indian wars, or so soon after, that the country was still in an unsettled condition, and travelling unsafe any where beyond the outskirts of civilization, a small party of adventurers, who had been to Mexico, and, on their return, had landed at the city of New York, undertook to go over land from that city or Albany to Montreal and Quebec, with the large treasure with which they had enriched themselves, during their expedition to the South.

Taking the usual route through Lake Champlain, or along its borders, then an almost unbroken wilderness, they reached the vicinity of the forts, about midway the lake, without much difficulty. But at this point they became apprised of the approach of a party whose object, they believed, was to plunder them of their treasure; and soon after, they found themselves so encompassed by their foes, that they deemed it their only chance of saving their wealth to leave the lake, bury all they had about them of value in some secluded spot, and then proceed to Canada by a different route. Accordingly they struck off from the lake to one of the most conspicuous peaks to be seen from their position, among the Green Mountains. And having reached the mountain by whose lofty peak they had been guided to the spot, they selected a wild and peculiarly formed nook, hemmed in by precipices and of difficult access, but easily to be recognized by themselves, or described to those to whom they might wish to impart their secret; and here they buried their treasure, consisting of gold and silver, many feet under ground. It was stated also that they performed over the spot sundry ceremonies and incantations, which, according to the superstition of the times, were necessary to prevent any but the rightful owners from obtaining the treasure. They then, prompted, probably, by their jealousy and distrust of each other, entered into a solemn compact, ratified by the mutual oath of the whole party, that they would return to the place only in company, and no one of them should presume to approach or touch the common treasure, except in the presence of all the rest, or those duly authorized to act for them; while the time of their return, which was to be as soon as the state of the country would permit with safety, was to be a matter of future appointment. When all these things were settled to their satisfaction, they left the place, and proceeded in a direct line through the woods to the nearest Canadian settlements, which they now soon reached, without further molestation; when, agreeing on some mode of communication to be kept up among them, their homes being in the different large towns in Canada, they separated in high spirits and with many happy anticipations of soon meeting again, to come into the individual possession and enjoyment of their wealth. They were destined, however, to meet no more. For sometimes they were prevented by the terms of their peculiar compact, some being sick or otherwise disabled, and refusing to appoint others to represent them; sometimes they were deterred by an inauspicious season, and sometimes by the presence of the enemy in the country where they had concealed their money. And thus, from one year to another, they were kept away from the object of their common interest, till all but one individual of the band were dead, or gone to parts of the world from which there was no probability of their return. The individual excepted, who had settled on the northern shore of Lake Memphremagog, where he still resided in indigent circumstances, having long waited in vain for the appearance of some of his comrades, and having become too old and decrepit to go himself in search of this long-buried treasure, of the secret of which he supposed himself now the only living depositary, had recently divulged the whole affair as above related to the present narrator, giving him full powers to go, search for, and, if found, to bring away the treasure, which was confidently believed still to lie hid in the earth at the exact spot where it was first deposited. And the latter, as he stated in conclusion of his strange story, having gained all the information which the old man was able to impart in relation to the locality, and every thing that would be likely to aid in the search, was now here for the purpose.

The adventurer having thus imparted his grand secret, and by his story rendered his proposed search sufficiently promising of successful results to induce the surveyor to engage in the project, it now became their first object to identify the mountain described by the old man as the locality of the treasure. This mountain, after discussing all the circumstances under which it was stated to have been selected, they both concluded could be no other than the one now so generally known by the appropriate appellation of CAMEL'S HUMP, which is the most conspicuous peak in the range of the Green Mountains, observable from Lake Champlain, in the vicinity of the old forts.

The requisite starting-point being thus settled, the adventurer and his guide now made their preparations, and secretly proceeded on their expedition. But notwithstanding the great confidence of the one, and the somewhat raised expectations of the other, in regard to their success, the search, as the reader has probably already anticipated, proved a fruitless one; for although they perseveringly explored for many successive days, not only the mountain above designated, but several others in the vicinity, next likely, in their opinion, to be the right ones, and although they found places, (so many, indeed, that it served more to distract than aid them,) places which served well enough to answer the description of the spot where the money was said to have been secreted, yet with all their scrutiny, whether exercised by excavating the earth or inspecting the surface, they were able to discover no treasures, nor, indeed, the least traces to indicate that any had ever been buried there.

The search was consequently abandoned, and the adventurer departed for Canada, from which he never returned, it is believed, to resume the hopeless project. Nothing more now occurred for several years having any bearing on the subject, and the Canadian's story, and the search which was made in consequence, were nearly forgotten, when a circumstance took place which revived the affair, and caused it to be more generally known and discussed than it had ever been before. A scientific gentleman and his son made a mineralogical excursion over Camel's Hump, during which, to their great surprise, they came across, in some dark recess under the mountain, evident traces of what had been a rude furnace, and near it they found several crucibles, such as are used in smelting the precious metals.

This circumstance and its supposed connection with the story of the Canadian adventurer, forming, it must be confessed, a curious and hitherto unexplained coincidence, gave rise, it is believed, to the first, and, indeed, all the attempts at money-digging, that ever were made in Vermont. No sooner were these stories, with the exaggerations usual in such cases, fairly abroad, than the dreamers of buried treasures were on the alert. Two separate companies were formed, one to commence operations on Camel's Hump, and the other on a large semicircular mountain some distance to the east of it. The former of these companies was headed by a native of the state, a pretended adept in finding secreted treasures, who, going on the Hump with his band of dupes, and selecting his position, undertook to find the particular spot where the money was buried, by ceremonies invented or patched up, probably by himself, consisting of a strange jumble of religious rites, and the forms said to have been used by magicians and sorcerers, such as singing hymns, enclosing himself in a circle marked on the ground, invoking unseen spirits, and holding ostensible conversation with them, with many other mysterious performances, the purport of which was as little understood by himself, perhaps, as by his wondering associates. The spirits, however, did not deign to direct the search, at this time, as he said, and after a day or two spent in this manner, the company left the mountain, with the promise of the leader to call them together again as soon as the auspicious moment should arrive, which, I believe, never happened.

The other company, which was organized, I think, the same summer, made a much more systematic and protracted attempt, which became invested in its progress with no small degree of romantic interest. And it was the doings of this secret and sworn band of adventurers, with some circumstances connected with the locality of their operations, which furnished all the hints for the story of *The Money Diggers*, as it was christened at the outset, but to which, as, in the progress of the tale, it was perceived that its main interest would turn on the destinies of the heroine, was added, or rather prefixed, the name of *May Martin*. The company was got up by a youngish man, who appears to have been a person of considerable adroitness and address, and who, coming into the obscure neighborhood situated near the mountains which became the scene of his subsequent operations, and there finding several individuals, well imbued with the money-digging mania, caught from the stories and circumstances before narrated, proceeded, upon the hints thus obtained, after coming into the place, very probably, to make known his pretended skill as a treasure-finder, and enlist the persons, whom he there found suited to his purpose and already eager for such a project, into a secret and strictly organized company for the professed object, as he held out, of discovering the long-sought treasure of which they had so often heard. This personage, who at the time was probably a refugee from justice from some other quarter, was doubtless a counterfeiter, and one of that extensive band of counterfeit-money dealers, who were first initiated into the mysteries of their art by the noted Stephen Burroughs, and who, in those days, rendezvoused mostly in some of the south-eastern townships of Lower Canada, from which they could carry their operations over the line into the States with the best chance of success and safety. He appeared to be well apprised of all that had been said and done in relation to the treasure supposed to have been buried in one of the mountains of Vermont. But whether he obtained his information by fishing it out from different individuals of the neighborhood, after coming into the place, and before forming his plans, or whether he obtained it, as he pretended, from the old man in Canada, referred to by the first adventurer, who was a different, and probably an honest man, I have never been able to determine. He professed, however, in his communications to his company, to have come on with fresh authority and instructions from the same source. And during the time he was enlisting his company, and making pretended approximations towards the exact place of the buried treasure, he made several journeys into Canada, for the ostensible purpose of consulting the old man and obtaining further information in regard to the locality, all of which was made to confirm him in the opinion, which, he told them, he at once adopted, as, in his general search, he entered their little settlement, viz., that one of the mountains which surround it must be the one in question. But although his story respecting the manner in which the treasure was originally buried was, in the main, the same which had been imparted to the surveyor by his predecessor, yet he now invested the transaction with several additional circumstances, such as the murdering of a man by the company and burying him with the money, to deter any from obtaining it but those initiated into the art of laying the ghost. This, and other circumstances of the like marvellous character, which, to subserve his own secret purposes, he threw over the affair, would greatly enhance the difficulties of obtaining the money, he said; but all these obstacles he well knew how to meet, and if his band would observe the rules he should prescribe to them, there was no doubt that, in spite of all the strange sights and sounds which might assail their senses, they would come off victorious. Having, in this manner, prepared his excited band, and secured certain contributions which he exacted from each of them, he at length led them to the spot in the mountain which he had selected as the scene of operation.

What now ensued, as it was made to appear to this heated band of enthusiasts, will be found, but with little amplification and embellishment, embodied in the tale, to which this sketch is intended as an introduction, in those parts that relate to the doings of the *Money Diggers*. Some of the incidents therein set forth, however, were with me, I may as well here state, rather matters of unavoidable inference than of known fact, such as the existence of an accomplice to the leader, and the part he enacted in getting up the strange spectacles and noises by which the company were unquestionably frightened from their nightly labors, and such also as the supposed fact, that this leader and his secreted accomplice were counterfeiters, or dealers in false coin, which they either brought with them from Canada or manufactured in some place of concealment in the mountains; this supposition being the only one by which I could account for the possession of the few counterfeit dollars which some of the company certainly got hold of in the course of their operations, supposing it to be genuine, and which, indeed, on being shown, led to threats of arrest, to the alarm and sudden and final dispersion of the whole company.

Having thus given the results of my investigation on the subject of money digging in Vermont, it now only remains for me to add, that becoming somewhat interested in the novel and dramatic incidents that were furnished in the operations of the company last and more particularly described, the details of which, in all their minutiæ, were given me some time afterwards by one of the acting members of the band, I subsequently made an excursion to the wild and sequestered part of the country where these events occurred. And here, after attending to whatever had reference to the particular affair that had led to my visit, and taking note of the remarkable and impressive scenery of the place, consisting of a partially settled glen, almost wholly environed by towering mountains, I was induced to make some inquiries respecting the original ownership and settlement of the valley. And the simple fact thus elicited, that it had once been mostly owned by a wealthy landholder of one of our Atlantic cities, who bequeathed it to a granddaughter, who married a plain but enterprising young man, an occasional resident of the place, furnished, with one or two other circumstances connected with the character and career of one of the early settlers, the slight superstructure of facts on which were founded the fortunes of *May Martin.*

THE AUTHOR.

MONTPELIER, June, 1850.

MAY MARTIN;

OR,

THE MONEY DIGGERS.

CHAPTER I.

> "With what superior grace enchants
> The face which Nature's pencil paints!
> Where eyes, unexercised in art,
> Glow with the meaning of the heart."

In one of those rough and secluded towns, situated in the heart of the Green Mountains, is a picturesque little valley, containing, perhaps, something over two thousand acres of improvable land, formerly known in that section of the country by the appellation of *The Harwood Settlement*, so called from the name of the original proprietor of the valley. As if formed by some giant hand, literally scooping out the solid mountain and moulding it into shape and proportion, the whole valley presents the exact resemblance of an oval basin, whose sides are composed of a continuous ridge of lofty hills bordering it around, and broken only by two narrow outlets at its northerly and southerly extremities. The eastern part of this valley is covered by one of those clear, mirror-like ponds, which furnish so interesting a feature in our Green Mountain scenery. This body of water, the freshly collected tribute of a hundred hills, and the chosen retreat of the fierce-eyed trout, the wild duck, and the trumpet-voiced loon, lies very nearly in the shape of a crescent, and extends along beneath the closely encircling mountains the whole length of the glen, to which it forms a bright and beautiful border of waters, wherein are forever reflected, faintly or vividly, as cloud or sunshine may prevail, the motley groups of the sombre forest around, where the more slender and softer-tinted beech and maple seem struggling for a place among the rough and shaggy forms of the sturdy hemlock, peering head over head from the ascending cliffs of the woody precipice; while here and there, at distant intervals, towering high over all, stands the princely pine, waving its majestic head in solitary grandeur, a striking, but melancholy type of the aboriginal Indian, still occasionally found lingering among us, the only remaining representative of a once powerful race, which, having receded before the march of civilized men, are now destined no more to flourish the lords of the plain and the mountain. This pond discharges its surplus waters at its southern extremity, in a pure stream of considerable size, which here, as if in wild glee at its escape from the embrace of its parent waters, leaps at once, from a state of the most unruffled tranquillity, over a ledgy barrier, and, with noisy reverberations, goes bounding along from cliff to cliff, in a series of romantic cascades, down a deep ravine, till the lessening echoes are lost in the sinuosities of the outlet of the valley. From the western shore of this sheet of water the land rises in gentle undulations, and with a gradual ascent, back to the foot of the mountains which here, as on every other side, rear their ever-green summits to the clouds, standing around this vast fortress of nature as huge sentinels posted along the lofty outworks, to battle with the careering hurricanes, that burst in fury on their immovable sides, and arrest, and receive on their own unscathed heads, the shafts of the lightning descending for its victims to the valley below; while they cheerily bandy from side to side the voicy echoes of the thunder-peal with their mighty brethren of the opposite rampart.

Nor is the beauty of the minor features of the landscape surpassed by the bold grandeur of the main outlines. The interior of the valley, for miles in extent, uniformly sloping to the eastward, is checked with beautiful alternations of lawn and woodland, forever richly clothed, in their season, with the wavy and lighter verdure of the cultivated field, or the deep-tinted and exuberant foliage of the forest; while a thousand gushing rills come dancing down from the surrounding heights to meet the morning sun, and glitter in his first smile, as he looks in over the eastern barrier on his return from his diurnal circuit.

At the period of which we are about to write, the rude dwellings of the small band of settlers, who then inhabited the valley, were scattered at different intervals along the road, which, entering from the south, wound round the westerly margin of the pond, and passed off through the interlapping mountains towards Canada. Of these dwellings, the largest and most respectable in appearance was the one situated in the most southerly part of the valley. The old log house of the pioneer, still standing in the background, surrounded by weeds and briers, had here given place to a new framed house of one story, which, together with the appearance of the out-buildings and the well-cultivated grounds adjoining, betokened a considerable degree of thrift and comfort in the circumstances of the owner.

Towards night on a beautiful summer's day, at the time we have chosen for the opening of our tale, a young man and maiden might be seen leaving the door of the cottage we have described, and leisurely taking their way across the pasture, in a direction to intersect the main road at the termination of the clearing on the south. The first named of this couple, apparently of the age of about twenty-five, was in the full bloom of vigorous manhood. His hardy, robust, and well-formed frame was graced with an open, frank, and highly intelligent countenance, indicative at once of an ingenuous disposition, a light heart, and the consciousness of a strong hand, with mental capacity to govern and render it available — exhibiting in his person a fine sample of the early immigrants of Vermont, who were almost universally men of uncommon physical powers, and generally of moral qualities which quailed at no ordinary obstacles — a fact attributable, probably, neither to chance, nor the peculiarly invigorating effects of their climate, but to the natural operation of these very powers and qualities themselves, which only could incite them to forsake the ease and comfort of an old settlement, with the certainty of encountering hardships in a new one, and enduring trials, from which men of common mould would shrink with dismay. His fair companion was evidently quite youthful. Her person was rather slightly formed, but of closely knit and beautifully rounded proportions, which were indebted for their almost faultless symmetry to none of the crippling arts of fashion, but solely to the hand of unrestrained nature, giving a free and graceful motion, and a step as light and agile as that of the young fawn of the mountains, among which she was reared. The complexion of her face, however, was, perhaps, too dark to be delicate, or to give full effect to the rich brown tresses that encircled her high forehead and fell profusely in natural ringlets down her finely-arched neck. And her features also, though regular, were remarkable only for the wonderful vivacity of their expression; though now, as she and her companion pursued their way from the house some rods in silence, her mind seemed absent, or absorbed by some care, her looks were quiescent and listless, and her dark blue eye seemed sleeping in abstraction — but lo! her lover speaks, and a thousand varying emotions suddenly manifest themselves in her countenance — a smile of peculiar sweetness plays on her lovely lips, her fair cheeks are wreathing in beauteous dimples, and her eyes brightly sparkle with the light of the soul, that seems to have taken perch, the instant, within them.

"May," said he, "May, my girl, do you know that I have invited you out for this little walk only to bid you adieu, and that too for a considerable season?"

"No! — surely!" replied the girl, pausing in her step, and looking up into the manly features of her lover, with an expression of lively concern — "surely, you are not going your journey so soon?"

"Yes, May, I have a horse in readiness at the village below, and thither I propose walking to-night, to be prepared for an early start for Massachusetts in the morning."

"And how soon will you return?"

"Perhaps I may be absent nearly two months."

"So very long!"

"Most probably — my business is such as may lead to delays — but why so concerned, May? this is one more absence, and then —"

"Yes, yes, I know what you would say; but why is even this absence necessary?"

"It is but right that you should know, May, and I will tell you. It is now nearly a year since I contracted for the land, on which I made a pitch, in this settlement. The time for a payment, when I am to receive a title, has nearly arrived; and I am going to gather up the little pittance of property, which I earned with my own hands, and left invested in my native state, when I departed for the wild woods of Vermont, and which I now need to enable me to meet this payment."

"It is right then, I presume, that you go; but yet I dread your absence."

"Dread! I hardly dared hope that my presence was so much valued, May."

"How vain, now! — no, no, I did not mean that — I have other reasons for dreading your absence."

"And what can they be, dearest May?"

"I have often thought I would never disturb your feelings by the story of my little troubles."

"Troubles! and not tell *me*, May — you surprise and disturb me already — to whom should you confide them, if not to me?"

"True, Mr. Ashley, true, if you take the interest in me which you profess — to you certainly, if to any one, should I confide them. And, indeed, should any thing happen to me in your absence, in consequence of their existence, I should wish, perhaps, I had apprised you of the difficulties which beset me—"

"O, tell me, tell me, May."

"I will—you already know that Mr. and Mrs. Martin, with whom I have lived from a small child, are not my father and mother, by relationship; and I am sorry to say, they are not more so by their treatment—often, too often, have they made me feel that I am the child of other parents."

"Why, surely you never even hinted such a thing before; and I certainly never suspected any thing of the kind. They always have appeared sufficiently kind to you, in my presence."

"O, yes, in your presence; and, even when you are in the neighborhood, they are more cautious in their cruelty; but as soon as you are fairly out of the settlement, for any considerable absence, I soon am made aware of it by other means than the void of my feelings, at the loss of your society. You have been told of a pedler who undertook to be my suitor, the year before you came here. That was their work; and I never shall forget their meanness in trying to unite me to that vagabond, —to get me out of the country, as I have often thought."

"But what reason can they have for such treatment? —and in what manner is it exercised?"

"I am not sensible of ever having given them any cause; and I cannot even guess at the reason. As regards the manner, it is no personal violence, that I complain of; but is it much less painful to be insulted,—despised,—to see, know, and be made to feel, that I am hated?"

"No, May, no. This is indeed news to me, but it must not, shall not be. I will this moment return and see them, and secure you a kinder treatment, or, as sure as my name is William Ashley, their house this day ceases to be your home."

"O, no! not for the world! not a step, — not a word, — if you love me, not a word to them of what I have told you. I would not leave them at this late period, — I can bear with them a few months longer; and then — and then, who knows," she continued, hesitating and blushing, as she dashed aside the tear that had gathered in her eye at the recital of her wrongs, and looked up archly to her lover, "who knows whether I am then to find a better home?"

"Who knows? Ah, May, let the time for proving this but arrive; for by all that is true and sacred in honor, or in love, I swear — "

"O, no, no, no!" interrupted the girl, with returning vivacity, and with that playful tact with which woman so well knows how to quell the storm she has raised in the less versatile bosom of man, "O, no, no, don't swear at me — I have enough of that at home."

The lovers, having now arrived at the end of their walk, seated themselves amidst a cluster of low evergreens, on the brink of a high bank, to indulge a while, before the final adieu, in that luxury of love, the interchange of mutual pledges of affection, on the eve of separation. The scenery of the spot was well calculated to enhance the natural interest of the moment, and hallow it to their feelings. Some twenty or thirty feet below, and almost directly under their feet, the road, just emerging from the woods, wound along on a scanty jut, or shelf of the hill-side, which, immediately beyond, formed a lofty precipice, terminating in the stream, that rushed in stifled murmurs swiftly down its rugged channel, deeply embowered in the overhanging forest beneath. The cool spray, stealing through the dark foliage of the lofty fir and spruce, whose roots were grasping the rocky margin of the stream a hundred feet below, and whose wavy and attenuated tops now seemed almost within the reach of the hand, was visibly rising athwart the bright pencils of the struggling sunbeams, in glittering vibrations to the heavens, and with grateful freshness came mingling on the senses with the balmy odor of the birch and gilead; while the seemingly low encircling firmament canopied their heads, with that deep and rich cerulean so peculiar to the woody glens of the Green Mountains. And all around and above them was breathing a purity, and shedding a tranquil brightness, beautifully emblematical alike of the innocent and unalloyed affections of their gushing hearts, and their sunny anticipations of the future.

Their enjoyment of these happy moments, however, was soon to be interrupted. Their attention was now arrested by the sounds of clattering hoofs in the road below; and turning their eyes to the spot from whence the noise proceeded, they beheld a single horseman, urging, with cruel applications of the whip, his faltering steed up the hill towards the settlement. When nearly opposite, or, rather, under the spot where our lovers sat, concealed from view by the boughs of their covert, the horse paused, staggered an instant, and fell, with his rider, to the ground. The poor animal, after a few convulsive flounderings, gasped feebly, and died on the spot.

" Damn the luck ! " exclaimed the traveller, giving the dead carcass two or three spiteful kicks, " damn the luck ! the horse is dead ! However," he continued, after a short pause occupied in taking a hasty glance up and down the road, and then over the precipice, " however, dead horses, like dead men, will tell no tales ; that is, if well buried. And here's grave enough down this bottomless gulf, in all conscience, I should think ; so now for a speedy funeral." So saying, and hastily unlacing a small valise attached to the crupper of the somewhat tattered saddle, and filled apparently with clothing, he grappled with main strength the body of the horse, and rolled it off the precipice, down the steep side of which it was heard heavily bounding through briers, bushes, and fallen tree tops, till it struck, with a faint splash, in the water below. With another rapid glance thrown cautiously around him, he took his valise under his arm, and proceeded leisurely on towards the settlement.

" I am so glad he is gone, and without discovering us ! " half audibly exclaimed May, the first to arouse from the mute surprise with which they had witnessed the whole transaction, that so suddenly came and terminated, like the detached scene of some panoramic exhibition passing quickly before them, " I can breathe again now. How strangely he talked to himself ! Don't you think his conduct very singular ? "

" Singular enough," replied Ashley ; " but he really displayed some cool philosophy in the death and burial of his horse, as he termed tumbling him down the gulf."

" Who and what can he be ? "

" I am puzzled to conjecture. But I am inclined to believe him some watched smuggler, who was riding for life to meet and secrete some goods he may have coming in this direction. These gentry often take this back road for their excursions, I am told." *

"It may be so; but I did not like his appearance any better than his actions. How suspiciously he looked around to discover if any one was in sight! and how cruel to beat his horse so, and then kick the poor creature as he was dying!"

"Nor did *I* like the appearance of the fellow, at all; and I confess I am not quite satisfied with my own solution of the affair. But I have no further leisure, at present, to bestow in useless conjectures: perhaps one or both of us may learn more, hereafter, that will throw light on the subject. And now, May, my dearest May, I must go, leaving you to return to the house alone."

"O, not yet."

"Indeed, and indeed, I must linger no longer. See! the sun is nearly to the mountains. But once more, May — do you love me?"

"O, too much!"

"And will be true?"

"Forever!"

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* Smuggling dry goods from Lower Canada into the States was carried on for many years previous to the last war, to an extent but little known, probably, to the public at large. And the woods, or the most thinly-settled towns in the northern parts of Vermont, were usually selected by those contrabandists, as furnishing their safest route out of the province. And the curious manœuvres of these gentry to escape the custom-house officers and their assistants; the skirmishes in the woods and by-roads; the races, the chases, the broken bones, and bloody heads thus occasioned in these wild and lawless proceedings, might furnish incident for a volume of no little interest.

"Then, dearest girl, may the great One above us preserve you. Farewell! farewell!"

"Farewell!" sighed the tearful girl, in accents soft and broken as the dying murmur of the distant cascade, with which they mingled on the air. An instant, and Ashley stood in the road below, giving the last lingering look of parting; another, and he had disappeared from the sight of his sorrowful companion, who slowly and pensively pursued her lonely way back to her now, more than ever, dreary and joyless home, at the cottage we have already described.

CHAPTER II.

"Her lovely mind could culture well repay,
And more engaging grew from pleasing day to day."

The owner of the cottage, as the reader is already apprised, was a Mr. Martin, who, with a few others, had made, many years before, the first permanent settlement in the valley. They had purchased of one Colvin, a resident of the small village to which allusion has before been made, situated some six or eight miles below, in the southerly corner of what had now become an organized town, embracing the greatest part of this settlement within its boundaries. This man had formerly acted as agent to Harwood, the original proprietor of the whole valley, in disposing of the same lands to others which he subsequently sold to Martin and his companions, as principal, the first occupants becoming sick of their bargains, or proving too poor and thriftless to pay for their farms, having abandoned and left them, before receiving any but defeasible titles, with their few scanty improvements, to more able and enterprising successors. About the time of this desertion of the first settlers, or rather squatters, perhaps, they might be termed, Colvin made a journey to the seaport in New Hampshire, where Harwood resided, and returned with the story that he had bought out the original proprietor, and was now sole owner of the valley. He then immediately set to work in searching for purchasers; and by his unwearied exertions in this respect, and the inducements held out by the smallness of his reduced prices, he soon succeeded in finding money purchasers for all the valley thought capable of improvement. This he had no sooner effected than he suddenly left that part of the country, and was heard of no more. From this time the settlement made rapid progress in improvement; and many of the families, there now permanently located, among which was that of Martin, were, at that period of our tale, in comparatively easy and comfortable circumstances. Martin and his wife, having no children of their own, had taken May, the heroine of our story, when quite young, and adopted her as a daughter. Of the girl's parentage little or nothing had ever been ascertained. Her mother, it appeared, had been taken ill on the road, in a neighborhood on the borders of New Hampshire, and gained admittance into a private family to remain during her confinement. The man who attended her was not her husband, but, as he stated, a person employed to convey her to her friends in Vermont. And pretending to give her name and residence, and leaving a sum of money with the family, amply sufficient for the present support of the mother and her expected infant, he immediately returned, for the purpose, as he avowed, of apprising her husband of her situation. The young woman — for so she seemed — in a few hours gave birth to a daughter; not, however, without the cost of her own life; for she was soon seized with a fever and delirium, which, in two or three days, put a period to her existence. The infant was handed over to nurse to a married daughter of the family, who resided with them, and who kindly received the little stranger to share with her own child that nourishment of which it had been deprived by the untimely death of its mother. After a few weeks had elapsed, no one in the mean time appearing to claim the child, a letter was sent to the address of the supposed father, but without bringing from any one either a visit or an answer. Recourse was then had to the postmaster of the town which had been given as the residence of the husband; and, in consequence, information was soon received, that no person or family of that name and description had ever resided there. And, as no other intelligence was ever after received on the subject, and neither any remarks of the deceased mother, during the few hours of her rationality after her arrival, nor any thing found among her effects, affording the least clew for unravelling the mystery, the transaction was very naturally concluded to be one of those frauds often practised to palm off as respectable some frail fair one and her illegitimate on strangers. The little innocent subject of these suspicions, thus left unknown and unowned among entire strangers, was not, however, on that account neglected. Having been at first whimsically termed the Mayflower, and finally May, from the circumstance of her having been born on the first day of the month of that name, she received the kindest attention from the family till nearly two years of age, when, becoming a pretty and promising child, she was taken by Martin, who then, and for some years afterwards, resided in that neighborhood, from which he removed to his present residence in the valley. During the first years of May's adoption, and till the removal of Martin to Vermont, she was allowed, summer and winter, the advantage of an excellent common school, in which she was distinguished for uncommon proficiency for her age. And the taste for reading, which she here thus early acquired, was ever after maintained and improved by means of a choice selection of books, which Martin inherited from his father, and preserved out of respect to his memory, rather than for any pleasure or profit they ever afforded him, or his still more unlettered companion. At this period also she was apparently much beloved by both Martin and his wife, and was uniformly treated by them with parental kindness and attention. But as she approached to womanhood, and began to attract the esteem and admiration of all who became acquainted with her, by her amiable disposition, her sprightliness and beauty, this former manifestation of kindness on the part of Martin and his wife began unaccountably to decline; and instead of receiving these demonstrations of esteem towards their deserving daughter with that pride and gratification which real parents would feel, they seemed to sicken at the praises she received, and view them with increasing uneasiness, giving vent to their feelings, at last, on the innocent and distressed cause of them, in such bitterness of manner and expression, as to render her often extremely miserable. And this treatment was the more painful and perplexing, as it arose from no avowed or reasonable causes, being founded, probably, in a sense of growing inferiority, and a petty jealousy at the preference with which she was personally regarded, and the greater respect which her intellectual superiority always commanded, leaving her the most hopeless of all tasks, the endeavor to conciliate those whose conduct arises from motives they are ashamed to acknowledge, and whose dislike has no other origin than in the baseness of their own hearts.

A new era now occurred in the life of May — the era of her first love. William Ashley, an intelligent and enterprising young man, had been employed by a gentleman of Massachusetts, owning wild lands in Vermont, to survey the tract lying west of the settlement. Making the valley his head-quarters, and the house of Martin his home, on his stated returns from his laborious duties in the woods, he became interested in May — loved her, and was soon loved in return, with all the purity and fervor with which a young maiden yields up her virgin affections. The intimacy soon resulted in an engagement of marriage, and a determination on his part to purchase a farm and settle in the valley; to all of which Martin and his wife either seemed coldly indifferent, or manifested their dislike; though, as before intimated, they had, the year previous, used considerable management to induce May to consent to the hasty proposals of one a thousand times less worthy. Ashley having now contracted for a farm, in pursuance of his resolution to settle in the place, his time had since been spent in alternately improving his new purchase, and resuming the avocation which had been the means of introducing him to the settlement.

Having now given the reader a brief sketch of the situation and characters of the leading personages of our little story, we will return to the thread of the narrative where we left it for this digression.

CHAPTER III.

"But pleasures are like poppies spread,—
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or, like the snow, falls in the river,
A moment white, then melts forever;
Or, like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or, like the rainbow's lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm."

After parting from her lover, May lingered almost unconsciously some time in the vicinity of the romantic spot which had witnessed their adieus—now listlessly stooping to pluck some favorite flower, which peeped from its covert beneath her devious footsteps, and now pausing to scratch, with her scissors, the initials of the loved one's name on the bark of some solitary tree, while her mind was sweetly occupied with the pleasant reminiscences of the past, or indulging in those dreamy and bright imaginings of the future, which love and hope are forever uniting to create in the bosoms of the youthful. And it was nearly sunset before she was aroused to the necessity of a speedy return to her home. Now quickening her steps, however, she soon arrived at the door, and was timidly entering under the expectation of receiving some ill-natured reprimand from Martin or his wife, as was their wont on her being long absent from her domestic duties, when, with a feeling approaching thankfulness, she caught a glance of a third person in the room, whom she took to be some neighbor, sitting with his back towards her, thinking that his presence would protect her from the anticipated rebuke, till the occasion should be forgotten. But this penalty she would have gladly suffered the next moment in exchange for the disagreeable surprise she encountered; for she had scarcely reached the interior of the room before the person turned round, and in him she at once recognized the man whose singular conduct she and Ashley had lately witnessed with so much surprise and suspicion. She instantly recoiled at the unexpected discovery, and stood a moment mute and abashed before the painful scrutiny of his gaze.

"Why! what ails the girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Martin. "A body would think she was afraid of strangers."

"Perhaps, wife," observed Martin, with a malicious smile, "perhaps May's walk has confused her wits a little — these love-meetings and love-partings are terrible things to fluster one — ain't they, May?"

"There!" rejoined the former, in a tone of exulting glee, "there! see how the girl blushes! I guess she thinks the gentleman may have seen her and her beau in their loving rambles across the pasture. May be, sir," she continued, turning to the stranger, "may be you witnessed the parting?"

"No, I saw no one after leaving the woods till I reached the house," replied the man, with evident uneasiness of manner. "Did you pass the way I came, miss?"

"I have not been in the road, sir," answered May, with as much calmness as she could command in her fresh alarm at the turn which the conversation now threatened to take, accompanied as the question was with a tone and look of suspicion for which she could readily account. The inquiry, however, to her great relief, was pursued no further, and, the conversation being now directed to other and indifferent subjects, she retreated from the room to hide her blushes, and shed tears of vexation at the unfeeling and wanton manner in which the secrets of her heart had been exposed to a stranger — and that stranger, too, the very one of all others before whom she would have been most anxious to avoid such an exposure, coupled as it had been with her walk, which had put her in possession of an unpleasant secret, as she feared it was, respecting him. How unlucky! she thought. Perhaps even now she had become the object of his suspicion and dislike. She had intended, before so unexpectedly encountering him on her return, to make known the transaction she had witnessed. But now should she do so, and the affair should be satisfactorily explained, she dreaded the ridicule which she probably must experience from all parties for having acted the spy and eavesdropper — and should it lead to the detection of some villany, perhaps she would have to be called into court as a witness — a consequence which she no less dreaded. She concluded, therefore, to keep the whole transaction carefully locked, as a secret, in her own bosom. Having come to this determination, and having succeeded by this time in allaying her disturbed feelings, and in assuming, in a good degree, a calm demeanor, she rejoined the company, her repugnance to the stranger being mingled with some curiosity to learn more of his character, and see whether he would mention the circumstance which had so unfavorably impressed her and her lover, and if so, in what manner he would explain it. But in this she was disappointed, as not the least allusion was then, or ever afterwards, made by him to the transaction. May soon perceived, however, that the stranger had already made rapid progress with his host and hostess towards gaining the footing of a familiar acquaintance; and it was with some surprise that she learnt that he was to become, for the present, an inmate in the family. He had introduced himself, it appeared, by the name of Gow, stating that he was travelling with the view of purchasing lands; and having heard that Harwood settlement presented good inducements to purchasers, he had now accordingly paid it a visit for this purpose. This avowal had led to a proffer of assistance, on the part of Martin, to further the object of the stranger, and soon to a compliance with the request of the latter to take up his abode in the family while he remained in the place. Such was the ostensible object of the stranger's visit. This information May gathered from her mother in the absence of the gentlemen, who, after supper, had taken a long ramble across the farm in the twilight of the delicious evening. But the truth of the account, which the man had thus given of himself, she felt much disposed to discredit; for though the story was simple and reasonable enough in itself, she yet was wholly unable to reconcile it, in her mind, with what she had witnessed; and the more she reflected on the subject, the stronger became her suspicion that there was something wrong in his character, and something which he was making an effort to conceal. During the course of the evening, May found frequent opportunities for examining the personal appearance of Gow (for by that name we shall now call him) more closely than she had before the means of doing. Though young, he was evidently considerably hackneyed in the ways of the world, and seemed well versed in the ordinary modes of flattery, and the art of insinuating himself into the good graces of strangers. His exterior was good, and his demeanor, with ordinary observers, might have been prepossessing. But those who scrutinized him more closely might easily have detected a hollowness in his manner, which showed that the heart was taking but little part in the wheedling language of the tongue, and a sort of questionable expression in the glances of his restless eye, which, like the savage foe in the woods, seemed to avoid open encounter, and to be continually skulking away and back, under the steady gaze of the beholder, as if guarding hidden motives with a constant apprehensiveness of their detection. Such, at least, were the impressions of May, whose scrutiny, instead of lessening, had now increased the dislike she had conceived towards this person. Besides, she was not altogether pleased with his manner towards herself. It was evident, from his remarks, that his inquiries concerning her had been already very particular; and he seemed to address her with too much of the air of an old acquaintance. In short, she felt, she scarcely knew why, that he had some preconcerted object in view some way connected with herself. And she retired to rest that night with sensations of displeasure, and with a disquietude of feeling that she had never before experienced.

While such thoughts and undefined apprehensions were agitating the guileless bosom of May, the disagreeable object of her reflections was occupied in another apartment, to which he also had retired for the night, in writing a letter to an absent associate. For the benefit of the reader, we take an author's privilege of looking over his shoulder.

"Well, Col., here I am, snug at Martin's, where I am to remain, at present, gentleman land-looker, as I call myself, till I put other business in train. I arrived this afternoon, — sooner by some days than I expected, — having come not slow, most of the way, I assure you. The honest fact is, I bought a horse at the end of the first day's journey. 'Bought!' you will say; yes, of an old white cow I ran afoul of in the stable. 'What a madcap!' you will exclaim, 'thus to endanger the success of our honest speculation.' But the fact was, Col., I was getting on too slow for my disposition, and — and I could not help it. But the animal fell down and died just as I was coming into the settlement; and I rolled him off a ledge into the brook, where he won't enjoy much more society, I am thinking, but that of the fishes and foxes, till he is pretty well distributed. So no danger from that little frolic. Now, for the girl; she is here, and no common affair neither, I assure you! Well formed, handsome, and knowing, — indeed, I fear me, she knows rather too much, — at least, that soul-reading sort of look of hers, I plainly see, will require a pretty thick mask. Besides, Martin tells me she is engaged to a young farmer, lately settled here, but who, luckily, started a journey for two months, just before I arrived. So, you see, I have got to push matters rather briskly; and it will be a hard case if she don't find herself Mrs. Gow before the fellow returns. Lord! if she knew but her own secret, or mine, I might as well try to catch a lark in the sky by whistling.

"As to the other part of our projected scheme, I am sure it will work well. Martin, whom, in my rapid way of doing things, I have sounded in all shapes, informs me that it is generally believed here that money or precious metals lie hid in these mountains; and I have already hinted my natural faculties in seeing in the magic stone,* (the wonders of which I find are still

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* The belief in the existence of a peculiar kind of stone, in which certain individuals possess the faculty of discovering things hidden or unknown to them before, formerly prevailed to some extent in many parts of this country. Nor has this alleged faculty by any means wholly ceased to find believers at the present time. As one among the several instances of which I have heard, I will mention that of a female pretender of this class, who, establishing herself in one of the central towns of the state, a few years past, drew multitudes around her, some coming to consult her respecting the situation of lost or stolen goods, some to ascertain the existence of suspected ores or mines, and some, and perhaps the greater part, to put her pretended faculties to such tests as they might severally contrive. And among the latter class, not a few, it must be confessed, became sorely puzzled to account for the singularly correct hits she made, on looking into her magic stone, in regard to the situation of their families at home, or other objects, of which they believed it impossible she could have any previous knowledge.

The kinds of stones used by these practitioners appear to be different. The one used by the woman above named was a bright, translucent stone, of the size and shape of a common razor hone; while that used by the Money Diggers of our tale was round, flat, and opaque. The manner of using them consists in putting them into a hat, placing the face into the crown, and fixing the mind intently on the object of inquiry, when a mental view is said to be obtained.

Although this alleged faculty passes among most of the intelligent as one of the humbugs of ignorance or superstition, yet why is its believed in, among them,) and in working the divining rods. Both of these marvellous implements I shall very naturally find in a day or two, probably; when I shall open the golden prospect to Martin's greedy eyes, and if it takes, as we may safely swear it will, I shall commence operations immediately. So, old boy, you may come on with your traps, as soon as you receive this, for I shall want you at all events.

"I will look out the old cave you described in the mountains, and have all things in readiness by the time you arrive.

"Yours in rascality, truly,

"Gow."

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reality more improbable than what is termed the clairvoyant state of animal magnetism, which has gained so many believers among the intelligent, and which is now striving for a place among the sciences? Indeed, should the latter be ever well established, I should be much inclined to place myself among the believers of the former, which perhaps might be explained on the principle, that the performers on the magic stone have the power of throwing their minds into the clairvoyant state, so that they can perceive whatever they choose of all that is passing without the scope of the senses, in the same manner in which it is said some do, whose whole system is put under the mesmeric influence.

CHAPTER IV.

> "Gold sowed the world with every ill;
> Gold taught the murdering sword to kill;
> 'Twas gold instructed coward hearts
> In treachery's more pernicious arts."

The next day was spent by Martin and his new acquaintance in the woods, the former acting as guide, as they rambled over the adjacent tracts of wild land in furtherance of the professed object of the latter's sojourn in the valley. The next, and the next, found them engaged in the same employment, to the great wonderment of May, who, knowing from the course taken by them, and from their returns to their daily meal at noon, that their excursions were always short and in the same direction, could not understand the use of so much exploring for a general examination of a few lots of land. She was also led to notice, that a deep intimacy was growing between them; and she soon perceived that they were engaged in some secret purpose, far different from that by which they pretended to be occupied. Gow affected, in the presence of the family, a knowing silence on the subject of their employment, and frequently pretended to check his friend as the latter began to throw out hints about new houses, improvements, and purchases, which seemed to imply a sudden change in his circumstances. All this, however, would have but little interested our heroine, and might have passed unheeded by her, had she not motives of her own for watching Gow's conduct, whose character, from the first, she had so much reason to regard with suspicion, and whose increasing attentions to herself, which could now no longer be mistaken for ordinary courtesy, and which grew every day more and more annoying, furnished her additional reasons for wishing to fathom his designs.

But it is time, perhaps, to apprise the reader more fully of the project in which Gow had enlisted Martin.

At the foot of a lofty mountain in the woods, about a mile north-westerly of Martin's house, a few days after Gow's arrival, these two personages might be seen seated on a fallen tree, the one with his face protruded into his hat, which he held in his lap, seemingly gazing at something at the bottom, while the other was attentively listening to the remarks which, at intervals, fell from the former. The dialogue, which now ensued between them, will sufficiently explain the nature of their employment.

"Are you quite certain, Mr. Gow, that you have at last found the real, genuine sort of stone which you have this wonderful faculty of seeing things in?"

"O, quite sure. It is the same thin, oval, yellow, speckled kind of stone I used when I discovered the pot of money on Cape Cod that they supposed Kidd buried there. How provoking to get only one hundred dollars for that job, when I might have gone shares with the men who employed me, had I chosen it! But the fact was, Martin, I was not at that time entirely certain that I possessed this faculty to so great an extent as I afterwards found."

"But what can be the reason that you cannot see in the stone at one time as well as another?"

"No one can exactly tell. A friend of mine, who has the faculty, and is deeply skilled in these matters, supposes it is the devil that casts a mist before the stone to hide what otherwise might be discovered; and this may be the case; or it is possible that it may have some connection with the weather, or state of the air. I had a beautiful clear view the first time I tried the stone, after finding it this morning, but as my mind was running on scenes in my own country, I made no discoveries of any thing hereabouts; for the view had faded away before I could turn my thoughts to this spot. One must keep his mind intently fixed on what he expects to discover, and wait with patience till the stone clears, and then, if there is any thing to be found, he will be sure to see it, and all the objects by which it is surrounded."

"How wonderful! By heavens! if I only had the faculty, I—"

"Hush — hush, Martin, it begins to clear."

"Does it? Mind and keep your thoughts on the mountain, Gow. Do you see any thing yet?"

"Nothing distinctly yet; nothing but woods, and high hills with light, misty clouds resting on them in broken masses, which seem to be dividing and slowly moving off. Stay! what peak is that which rises in sight? Zounds! Martin, it clears every instant; and I can plainly distinguish the very mountain we are under. Look along the top of the ridge towards the north. Now see if you discover a tall, dry tree — pine, I should think — standing just above a bare rock."

"Yes, there is the very tree, as I live; and the rock, too, by Jupiter! But do you see any thing else?"

"Be easy a moment; I just caught a glance of something glimmering farther down; but it appears to be gone now. There! I have it again—right below the tree; but down, down to the very foot of the mountain. Now it comes, brighter than ever—something of a white, shining appearance. Silver! silver! Martin, as true as I am a sinner, coined dollars of silver, deep under ground!"

"O heavens and earth!" exclaimed Martin, leaping up and rubbing his hands in ecstasy; "but mark the spot, Gow, where it lies; be sure to mark the spot."

"I have," replied the other, taking his face from his hat; "the view has all died away, now, and I shall not, probably, get another at this time. But what a glorious sight! O, my stars, if you could have seen it! The first day we were out here, when I strayed from you, as you remember I did, I cut and tried a divining rod; and, from the working of it in my hand, I became satisfied that there was a treasure near this mountain, as I afterwards hinted to you, but I certainly never dreamed of such a mint of coined money. But come, let us go to the spot and put some private marks on the trees, as near the place as we can hit by guess."

So saying, Gow pocketed his magic speculum, and, hastily setting out for the place just designated as the spot where the treasure lay concealed, they soon came opposite to the tall tree and rock before mentioned, and halted close to the foot of the mountain.

"There," exclaimed Gow, looking around, and measuring the spot with his eye, "there, Martin, within the compass of one acre around us, I will stake my life, there lie buried beneath the ground more than ten thousand hard dollars; but," he continued, with a look of mysterious gravity, "but it may require much time and labor to find it; and we may have to fight dead men and devils before we get fairly hold of it."

"I will agree to fight both, to their teeth, to get hold of a tenth part of that sum," cried the other, in boastful rapture.

"Well, then," said Gow, "we will now begin to think of the project in good earnest. But as it will take much hard digging, probably, to reach the treasure, — more, doubtless, than we, with our single hands, can ever expect to do, — we shall be compelled to form a small company of four or five trusty individuals, beside ourselves, and then we shall be able to do business to some effect."

"Why, yes; but cannot we get along without this?" said the avaricious Martin. "We might then have all the money to ourselves."

"Ay, ay, if we could, and that were all; but you must know that there are some conditions to be complied with in this business; for besides their labor, which we shall need, you forget that I cannot exercise my skill, in making you rich, for nothing; and you will hardly be willing, or able, alone, to raise the sum I shall make you agree to give me before I go on."

"How much?" asked the other, with symptoms of alarm.

"Not less than five hundred dollars."

"What! five hundred dollars, and go shares, too?"

"Exactly. If I only went shares, what should I get for my skill?"

" Yes, but five hundred dollars! it is extortion, Gow, rank extortion! and I won't give it; I will go alone first."

" Go on then," said Gow, with a cool sneer, " and we will see how much you will make by money digging without me."

" I did not mean any offence, Mr. Gow," rejoined Martin, in an apologetic tone, seeing the determined manner of the other, and fearful of pushing matters too far with him; " I meant no sort of offence, but how can I raise such a sum?"

" True," said Gow, " I knew you could not, and therefore had an additional reason for proposing to form a company; and this we must do — one hundred dollars apiece will then be all that is required."

" And one hundred is more than I know how to raise," observed Martin, despondingly.

" I shall be fair with the company," said the other, without seeming to heed the last remark of Martin. " I shall be honorable, and to show them that there is no deception in the business, I will not require them to hand over the money till the first dollar of the treasure is found; and then, before the treasure is opened, they must have it in readiness to pay over on the spot, and let me go equal shares in all that is found. These will be my conditions."

" Well, I don't see why that is not all fair."

" And hark'ee, friend Martin; there is one way by which I might, perhaps, let *you* off from paying the hundred dollars, or even any thing — if I thought — if — "

" If what?" eagerly asked the other — " if there is such a chance for me, for heaven's sake let me know it — any thing that I can do — "

"Yes, yes, Martin, but there is the trouble, perhaps, — for I fear you cannot do me the favor I was thinking of, if you would; and I don't know that I ought to ask your interference — but I can name the case, and then you can tell me, if you please, what your notions are on the subject. You may have already perceived, perhaps, that I have taken a fancy to your adopted daughter, May Martin — "

"Why, yes; but what do you want of her? It would give me a bad name, if I should have my hand in — "

"O, you quite mistake my intentions. As I said, I have taken a fancy to the girl, and I have made up my mind, even on our short acquaintance, to make a wife of her, if she will marry me; but she appears to be shy, and I suspect is determined to refuse any offers I may make her. Now, if, in this business, you feel disposed to assist me — "

"O, if that is all, I will use all my influence to persuade her to accept your offer."

"Yes, that you of course would do, if you felt disposed to favor my suit. But can't you so manage as to warrant my success? Now, what I was going to say was this: if you will insure me the girl, I will release you from paying me a cent in this affair; that is, if you will bring it about within a month."

"A month! — that is a short time — why such haste?"

"Why, it is always my way to do things at a dash. I may as well marry now as ever; and I trust we shall reach the treasure by that time at least; when you, otherwise, would have to pay me over the money."

"True, I had forgotten that. Well, we will see what can be done. But how on earth to bring it about I know not. She is engaged to that Ashley, as you heard my wife say, and no doubt is determined to marry him, let who will come. And he — he too is a bold, straight-going fellow, who would not stand aside for a regiment."

"But he is absent."

"Yes, and that is lucky so far. If she could be weaned from him, before his return; and she did not write to bring him back upon us —"

"O, the last can be managed; but will he write to her?"

"I presume so; but why that question?"

"I merely asked out of curiosity. But who brings her letters from the village, where they come, I suppose?"

"I shall, probably, myself. Why?"

"Now suppose you should withhold the letter, and never let her know any had come for her?"

"That might have effect in making her think she was neglected, perhaps."

"And supposing you should let me take the letter and write her one in imitation of his hand, sign his name, and let you give it to her?"

"Yes, but there would be no cheating her, in this way — she is as keen as a razor — I have sometimes thought she could tell my very thoughts, the prying hussy!"

"But I could cheat her, though. I am handy with the pen, and could once imitate any hand, so that the writer himself could not tell which was his own."

"That would be rather roguish, would it not, Gow? Besides, when Ashley returned, he would raise Ned with you for such a trick."

"Why, I should calculate to make you a rich man, take the girl and be off to my own country, long before he came back. But I see you are not disposed to help me and yourself in this business —"

"O, you are mistaken; I was only contriving; and I begin to think we can manage it; and if you intend to take her out of the country, wife will lend a stiff hand, depend on't. She thinks May is quite too knowing, considering, and will soon get above us all; and to tell the truth, I have lately had a sort of a notion that the girl would bring some bad luck to us, in one shape or other. But take her away from this place, and she will make a smart wife enough, I dare say. Gow, she shall be yours, by hook or by crook, and there's my hand on it."

This last point being settled to the mutual satisfaction of these worthy personages, they then proceeded to discuss and settle the details of the plan of operations proposed by Gow for coming at the buried treasure; the result of which was, that Martin should take upon himself the task of forming a company from such of his neighbors as he should select, as most trusty and best fitted for the enterprise. The work was to be commenced as soon as a company could be formed; to be carried on in the night, and with all possible secrecy. Gow was to superintend and direct the whole business. And for the purpose, as he told Martin, of guarding the spot, and always being near to catch every view, which was to be had from his magic stone, and of making frequent trials with the divining rod, he was to erect a shanty, on some part of the mountain above, for his chief residence, till the treasure was found, where no one was to presume, on any account, to approach him, pretending that he could only make his discoveries to any advantage when entirely alone. Here he was to be supplied with provisions, &c., from Martin's house, to which he should only repair for the purpose of prosecuting his suit with May. Their whole plan being thus adjusted, they returned to the house with the understanding that each should proceed to his allotted part on the following morning.

CHAPTER V.

"May horror seize his midnight hour
Who builds upon a parent's power,
And claims by purchase, vile and base,
The loathing maid for his embrace.
Hence virtue sickens ; and the breast,
Where peace had built her downy nest,
Becomes the troubled seat of care,
And pines with anguish and despair."

From this time every means was tried, and every art put in requisition by Martin and his wife, to forward the projected match between Gow and their adopted daughter. Their first attempts were confined to endeavors to impress her with favorable sentiments towards her new lover, and, at the same time, to prejudice her mind against Ashley, and destroy the high estimation in which they well knew she deservedly held him. But not long resting satisfied with their progress, in this indirect method of accomplishing their base purpose, they soon proceeded to open importunities, using every persuasion to induce her to yield to their wish, and exhausting every argument their ingenuity could invent, which they thought likely to shake her still unaltered purpose of fidelity to her betrothed lover, and turn her mind to the man of their worse than mercenary choice, — sometimes setting before her glowing pictures of the wealth and splendor to be gained by a union with Gow, and then contrasting this with the life of labor and obscurity which they told her must be her certain lot if she married Ashley; sometimes resorting to flattery, followed by abject entreaties; and sometimes to menaces and bitter denunciations, in case she finally refused to comply with their wishes and commands; till the poor girl felt as if she must sink under their united persecution. With the object of this unwearied intercession himself, she succeeded much easier in securing herself from annoyance. He had by this time proposed himself in direct terms, and had received a decided and unqualified refusal; and the simple majesty of innocence, and virtuous rectitude of purpose, all unprotected and discountenanced, as they were, on all sides, conveyed a rebuke, before which, with all his assurance, he could not help quailing. And he shrank from the cold dignity of her presence, leaving her mostly unmolested by open attempts to soften her obduracy, choosing rather to rely on intrigue and deception, to effect a design, which he was well aware any manly or honorable course would fail of accomplishing. But this new and unexpected attempt of Martin and his wife, situated as she was, to control her inclination, and induce her to violate her plighted faith, was much less easily combated, and doubly enhanced her distress and perplexity. Their motives for this cruel conduct, she soon rightly conjectured, must arise from some advantage to be gained by the success of their endeavors — some tempting condition, by which Gow had bribed them; but why any such advantage, or bribe, should be offered by the latter, she was wholly at a loss to imagine. She felt satisfied that his anxiety to obtain her hand did not proceed from any love which he had so hastily entertained for her; and much less could it arise, she thought, from any pecuniary or other advantage to be gained by marrying a penniless and obscure orphan. But that such was his determined purpose she could no longer doubt; and it was equally clear to her that her parents were closely leagued with him in the design. The neighbors, too, it was apparent, from their jokes and indirect advice to her, in their intercourse with the family, had been biased by the account which they had received of the new comer, and had already arrayed themselves on his side, and stood ready to advocate his cause. While the reluctance she had conceived to divulge what she knew of him, or to say aught to his disadvantage, as long as he was a favored inmate of her family, mingled with a delicacy of feeling, forbidding her to discuss the character of an avowed lover, all combined to prevent her from trying to undeceive her acquaintance in their opinion of Gow, or to make known to any one the wretchedness and difficulty of her situation. And had she attempted this, and made known her difficulty, she knew not that it would avail in changing the popular current, which she saw was now setting in favor of Gow, or in alleviating her embarrassments. She resolved, therefore, to endure in silence, and though alone and unfriended, to persevere, in her unshaken determination of resistance, till the return of Ashley should put an end to her sorrows and troubles.

"What great object do you propose to gain, May?" said Martin one day during this ceaseless warfâre against the peace and happiness of the persecuted girl — "what great object do you propose to gain by rejecting such a man as Mr. Gow, and accepting such a fellow as Ashley?"

"I shall at least gain the approbation of my own conscience, father; for I have promised him solemnly, and he told me that he had your consent."

"I might have said something of the kind, perhaps, when I supposed you could do no better; but these foolish promises which boys and girls make to each other, — what do they amount to? And how long does either party hesitate about breaking them, when, finding they can do better with themselves, they wish to make another choice?"

"But I have no wish to make another choice; and if I had, I hardly think I should gain much by the change you propose."

"You don't pretend to compare Ashley to Mr. Gow, do you?"

"Certainly I should not wish to compare him to this suspicious man —"

"What do you mean, girl? Would you insinuate any thing against the character of Mr. Gow — a gentleman, and a friend of mine, as he is?"

"I do not wish to say any thing about him; but friend or gentleman, as you may believe him, you would be much better employed, I suspect, in guarding yourself against his arts, than in trying to drive a poor, friendless, and unprotected girl into his clutches."

"What mean you, May Martin, once more I ask?" sternly demanded he, stamping on the floor. "What reasons for your scandalous insinuations can you give? Speak — tell them if you have any. No wonder you hesitate; for you have none to give — 'tis all but a foolish, stubborn girl's whim — prejudice against a man who loves you, but who is too good for you, and condescends too much in wishing to make you rich and happy. I tell you, girl, you must marry him!"

"O, I cannot, father — never, never!"

"You won't, then, will you? You forget that you are not of age yet, and that I have an indenture in that desk that puts you completely under my control?"

"I forget nothing, sir. I know my duty, and have always endeavored to do it; and can you say as much respecting the cruel course you are now pursuing towards me? Does that paper, to which you so insultingly allude, give you the power to dispose of me in marriage, without my consent, and against my inclinations?"

"Hush, impudent!" vociferated Martin, again stamping in rage. "A lecture on my duty, hey? Fine times, I should think!"

"May don't remember," chimed in Mrs. Martin, with a spiteful leer and taunting tone — "May don't remember who took her when she was a little ragged outcast, that no father would come to own, and fed, clothed, and educated her, and gave her a respectable home?"

"O, I have, I do remember it," said May, bursting into tears; "I remember it all, and would to Heaven I could think of those days of kindness, without associating them with later treatment — with this, this bitter hour of insult and cruelty!"

"Come, come, you silly girl," said Martin, after waiting till her paroxysm had a little subsided; and now changing his manner into a half-coaxing, half-expostulating tone, "come, come, May, I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I do not wish you to do any thing but what I think is for your good. You yourself will be as ready to marry Mr. Gow, as you are now opposed to it, as soon as you find that Ashley has left you for another sweetheart."

"Ashley?" said May, slowly taking her handkerchief from her tear-bathed face, and looking at Martin with an air of mingled surprise and censure, "Mr. Ashley will never do that."

"Pshaw! nothing more likely!" responded Martin, carelessly. "You don't know William Ashley as well as I do."

"Well enough, however," replied May, promptly, "to know that he will never do that, any sooner than I should voluntarily leave him for your Mr. Gow."

"You would hardly dare promise to marry Mr. Gow, on condition of Ashley's desertion, I suspect?"

"Indeed I should, sir!"

"Well, let us have your promise, then."

"I fear not to do it, sir, on that condition," rejoined May, in a tone of unsuspecting confidence; "and if such a promise will relieve me from any more persecution, and teasing to marry Gow, till Mr. Ashley is false to me, I will make it."

"Well," observed Martin, with a well-feigned air of indifference, "I will take you at your word. I suppose we must submit to the condition, though I still say we do not wish to force your inclinations, only so far as we know is for your own interest. And now you have made this promise, May, I hope you will think, should this condition be fulfilled, that it is as wicked to break it as you now do to break your promise to Ashley." So saying, and with a treacherous smile on his countenance, he left the room.

May marvelled much at the unexpected termination of the dialogue, which had begun so differently, and threatened so different an ending; and after Martin had retired, she endeavored to draw something from his wife, which would go to explain her husband's sudden apparent willingness to drop his purpose for a promise made on a condition which she felt so confident could never happen. But that dame, who was naturally taciturn and cautious, and who rarely ever betrayed the secrets of her heart with her tongue, while her cold, severe, and unvarying countenance was generally equally proof against all scrutiny on what was passing within, pretended to know nothing of the affair, and after a few unsatisfactory replies, sunk into her usual forbidding silence. Our heroine, therefore, notwithstanding she felt some little misgiving relative to her promise, and an undefined suspicion that there was something wrong about it, yet seeing no reason why it should be different from what the circumstances purported, could not but congratulate herself on the prospect now presented of a reprieve from her persecutions; and the latter feeling prevailing, she dismissed the subject from her mind, and resumed her domestic occupations with a cheerfulness to which she had some time been a stranger.

CHAPTER VI.

"O, what reward, what gold, what price,
Can recompense the pangs of vice?"

For nearly a week from the interview just narrated, no allusion was made, in the presence of May, to the dreaded subject of a marriage with Gow; and in the respite thus allowed her, she began to hope that her peace would no more be disturbed by any further recurrence of those scenes which had lately caused her so much distress and perplexity. And this hope, added to the cheering expectation she now daily entertained of receiving a letter from Ashley, imparted a new impulse to her feelings, and was fast obliterating the remembrance of her late trials from her mind. But this happy quiet was not long to continue; and, like the deceitful calm of the elements which often precedes the fearful tempest, it soon proved to be but the prelude to new and aggravated sorrows.

"May," said Mrs. Martin one day, as, glancing through the window, she saw her husband approaching the house, in company with Gow, "May, did Mr. Martin bring you any letter yesterday from the village?"

"Any letter!" replied May, in surprise; bring me a letter! no; did he go to the village yesterday? I knew nothing of it."

"Yes, he went," said the other, with an affected commonplace air, "and I thought likely he might have found a letter for you there, by this time; but here he comes himself, and can tell you whether he inquired for one. I'll warrant he did not though, he is such a forgetful creature. Say, Mr. Martin," she continued, turning to her husband, as he now entered the room, "did you inquire at the post-office, yesterday, for a letter for May?"

"There, now!" exclaimed Martin, with a seeming abashed and self-condemning manner. "Well, if that don't beat all! I should not blame May for scolding now; for, of all forgetful fellows, I believe I must be the worst. Yes, I did call at the office, and got her a letter from Ashley, I conclude; and here I have carried it in my pocket ever since."

"O, how could you! But where is it — O, where is it?" eagerly exclaimed the animated girl, starting up and advancing.

"Here," replied Martin, pulling out the letter and presenting it, "here it is; and now we shall see no more of you till that is read, and reread, a dozen times over, I suppose."

As the hungry bird darts upon the luscious grape, accidentally revealed to his sight while wandering weary and famished for food, so did May upon the valued prize before her; and scarce was it within her eager grasp before she bore it off, with eyes sparkling with joy and triumph, to another room, there to feast on its anticipated contents, which, in fancy, were to thrill her own bosom with delight, and, at the same time, to furnish an ample refutation of the unjust and ungenerous surmises of Martin concerning the fidelity of her beloved Ashley. No sooner was she alone, than with trembling haste she tore open the seal and read, in the well-known hand of her lover, as she thought, as follows: —

"Miss May Martin: —

"Knowing you would expect a letter from me about this time, and considering it a duty to apprise you of some changes relative to myself, I have thought best to write you briefly. On my arrival at my old residence, I there met with one with whom I once had considerable intimacy, which was broken off by a misunderstanding between us, and I supposed the separation to be final. That misunderstanding is now, however, satisfactorily cleared up, and, with a renewal of acquaintance, feelings which, when with you, I supposed dead, have revived. I presume you would not wish to marry a man who entertains a preference to another; I think I know you too well to believe you would, for a single moment, endure the thought of such a union. And therefore it is extremely doubtful whether I return at all to Vermont. I have luckily found a man here who has taken my land contract, in the settlement, off my hands. Do not think I shall ever entertain any other feelings towards you than those of sincere friendship and the highest respect.

"William Ashley."

During the perusal of the first part of this unloverlike epistle, the countenance of May exhibited a surprised and disappointed expression, produced seemingly by the formal and unaccustomed introductory address, as well as not meeting with any thing she expected to find. But this expression, as she continued, soon changed into a look of blank bewilderment, like that of one utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of the writer; and it was not till she had reached the concluding line, that the painful truth, which the writer, with apparent reluctance, seemed impelled by a sense of duty to communicate, flashed for the first time across her mind. Then it was that the ashy paleness of dismay spread over the quivering muscles of her face; and, with a hurried, mechanical kind of motion, she again commenced reading, trembling more and more violently as she proceeded, till, her agitation becoming too great to continue the perusal, she dropped the fatal paper on the table, and, lifting up her hands, with a look of utter hopelessness and misery, indistinctly murmured, " O, may not this be some dreadful dream, from which I shall awake?" — and she pressed her hand hard upon the swelling veins of her forehead, as if to recover her consciousness. "No, no," she at length more audibly uttered, in a tone of despairing grief — "no, no. Wretched, O, wretched, lost, wrecked, and ruined! and all but Heaven has now deserted me." Tears now gushed and fell in a shower from her eyes, and, covering her face with both hands, heart-rending sobs alone gave further utterance to the agony of feeling with which her bursting bosom was laboring.

At this moment Martin, followed by Gow, entered the room.

"Why! what is all this now?" exclaimed the former, in affected surprise. "What is the matter? what can have happened, May? O, something in the letter — but do let us see what dreadful news it contains!" So saying, he officiously bustled up to the table where May was sitting, in the posture above described, with the letter open before her, without moving, or offering any resistance to Martin's taking it, and seemed busily to run over the contents. "There!" he presently exclaimed, turning to his friend — "there! this is just what I always expected — that fellow, Ashley, has cast May aside for an old sweetheart, and has had the impudence here to tell her so — though it is scarcely three weeks since he was vowing and cooing round her, like all the world. The false-hearted scoundrel! But May had fair warning how the fellow would treat her; and now I hope she will put a proper value on the offers of those who really love her, and are worth a thousand such fellows to boot."

"Yes, May," said Gow, in a low, soothing tone, as he approached and leaned over the table by her side; while Martin, under pretence of further examining the letter, moved off to an opposite window — "yes, May, now this great obstacle to your marrying another is entirely removed, I hope you will no longer refuse to hear my offer."

"O, do not torment me," she replied in broken utterance, her face still buried in her hands; "O, leave me alone, I do beseech you."

"May!" interrupted Martin sternly, "remember your promise — you recollect — if Ashley deserted you! Have you forgotten it so soon?"

The wretched girl groaned aloud.

"You are silent," continued her interrogator, "and well you may be; for you will hardly deny the solemn promise you made me, not a week since; and I now call on you to fulfil it. Do you consent?"

"O, have mercy — some mercy," she cried, rising and moving towards the door — "some mercy on a poor, broken-hearted girl!"

"Do you consent? I again say," sternly demanded Martin, rising and endeavoring to intercept her retreat.

"Do what you will with me — sell me for a slave — kill me, if you please, but let me go now: O, do let me go!" was the beseeching reply, as, with streaming eyes and convulsive sobs, she escaped from her inquisitors, and fled to her own apartment.

"Let her go, Martin," said Gow, hastily, as the other was about to follow or command her back, "let her go; let the matter rest just where it is. Silence gives consent of itself — besides, have you not her express leave to do with her just as you please? What more do you want?"

"Why, true, Gow," replied the other, hesitating under the twinges of some remains of conscience, which still lingered in spite of all the trainings it had lately received — "true, she all but consented — and did consent, in a sort — but — but you see she is no more willing now than before — and — how would you manage it?"

"Manage it! why, there is nothing to do but go ahead: you saddle your horse, and go directly to the parson; tell him to publish the banns next Sunday, and be on hand to tie the knot, on some day you and your wife shall fix on, as soon as your laws will allow; for I mean to go by Gunter in this business."

"Yes, but —"

"But what? You are thinking about raising the hundred dollars, I conclude, or you would not hesitate to go on, now your chance is so much better than ever to save it. I tell you, man, one thing *or* the other must be done soon."

The last hint was sufficient for a man of the disposition of Martin, and he at once forgot his qualms of conscience, and tamely promised obedience to the commands of the other.

"Well, then," said Gow, "go on as I told you: the game is now within certain reach, if all is kept still. We will let the girl alone pretty much till the day arrives, and in the mean while, we will drive hard at our business at the mountain; for I should like amazingly to have a few of those jinglers in my pocket for wedding music."

"Amen to that," said Martin, as he left his friend for the business more immediately before him.

"Dirty miscreant!" soliloquized Gow, after his friend had left the room — "what a precious scoundrel, but for your pusillanimous fears, which only make you hesitate here, or any where! But with all your duplicity and good will to play false with me, I can keep the knave in you straight, by means of the miser and the coward. Rogue as I am, I despise you for your meanness to this noble girl, whom you should protect; and had I not a greater object in view than you can have in this affair, I would hang myself, before I, who have no such duties towards her, would be guilty of even the part I am taking, though a thousand times more decent than yours. It will do me good to see you punished, as you will be, with a vengeance, for this shuffling to me, and baseness to her. Ha! you little think, that while you are helping me to a fortune with one hand, you are twisting a rope for your own neck with the other."

CHAPTER VII.

> "Guid Lord, how they were quakin!
> But whether 'twas the deil himsel,
> Or whether 'twas a banken,
> Or whether it was Andrew Bell,
> They did na wait on talkin
> To spier that night."

WE will now follow the eager-eyed expectants of the glittering treasure to the theatre of their secret operations in the woods. A company of five individuals, besides Martin and Gow, had already been formed, according to the plan before mentioned, and many nights had been spent by them in making excavations on the spot indicated by their leader, who generally remained with them several hours each night in directing their movements, before he retired to his retreat on the mountain, where he had now for the most part taken up his quarters. For the first few nights of their digging, he had directed their efforts to different places within a circle of some ten rods in diameter, designated by certain marks on the trees, and constituting a boundary, within which, he told them, he had rendered it certain, by views obtained in his magic stone, and the working of the divining rods, that the money lay buried. But for several of the last nights he had ordered them to proceed on in excavating in the same vein, assuring them that they might depend on having centred on the right place, and to so great a certainty was this now reduced, as his stone and often-tried rods informed him, that he could safely promise them that a few more nights' labor would bring them to the treasure. And such being the case, he called on each man to have the bonus, to be paid him on reaching the first dollar, in readiness; and at the same time he declined assisting them any further, till they severally complied with this indispensable requisition. This, for several days, caused a suspension of their labors; for it required no small exertions on the part of the company generally, and many sacrifices on the part of some of them, to raise, at that day, the necessary sum. But their exertions and sacrifices, great as they were in some cases, were cheerfully and even anxiously made, in the fancied certainty of soon being a thousand fold repaid, in the glittering harvest which they were about to reap. Farms were unhesitatingly mortgaged to distant money lenders; oxen and horses, the only ones possessed by their owners, were sold at reduced prices; and all kinds of property were disposed of or pledged, for a tithe of the value, to meet the exigency. And so great was their activity, that before one week had elapsed, every man of the company had reported himself to his leader, as prepared with his hundred dollars in his pocket, and eagerly demanded to be led again to his work.

Hitherto the enterprise had been conducted with so much caution and secrecy, that little was known in the neighborhood, except by those immediately concerned, of its existence, and much less of the object for which the company was formed. But either by reason of the stir created by raising the money, or because the growing certainty of success had rendered the different members of the association less guarded, vague rumors were beginning to be afloat in the neighborhood, that some uncommon adventure was going on in the mountains; and many were the conjectures and dark surmises made concerning its character and object — the secrecy with which it had been conducted sufficing to throw an air of mystery and romance over the proceeding. And this had been considerably increased by the appearance, about this time, of a singularly accoutred old man, who had been known to enter the settlement from the north, and was several times afterwards seen hovering around the outskirts of the woods, back of which was the supposed scene of these mysterious operations — some believing him the devil himself come to superintend the ceremonies of the black art which they suspected was in performance in the woods, and others, more given to matter of fact calculations, and disposed to view secrecy and mystery as generally the cloak of iniquity, shrewdly suspecting him to be an agent sent from Stephen Burroughs's *Snag Factory*,* in Canada, to establish a branch in this unexposed part of the Green Mountains. And it was the impression of all, indeed, that this strange personage had some connection with the doings of the company. Those, however, who were supposed to be its members, stoutly denied the truth of this supposition, being, probably, with the exception of their leader, really as much in the dark concerning the cause of the appearance and the character of the old man as their neighbors.

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* The counterfeit bills by which the celebrated Stephen Burroughs once flooded the country, were at that day usually denominated *snags*

It was on a dark night, in July, a few days subsequent to the scene in which we left our heroine at Martin's, that the money diggers resumed their labors. Excited by the late assurances of Gow, they came, one by one, stealing to the spot, at an early hour, and as usual, having kindled a small fire, and stuck a pine-knot torch in a stump, on the bank of the excavation, to furnish light for their operations, they waited, with nervous impatience, the arrival of their leader, to direct the spot on which their efforts were now to be bestowed. The latter soon made his appearance; and, after giving his directions, with the mysterious gravity with which he had sustained his part through the whole enterprise, and seeing them fairly at work, he soon informed them that from the experiments he had been making through the day, he had strong hopes of reaching the treasure in the course of a few hours, and that he should remain with them till the close of their labors for the night. This thrilling announcement added fresh ardor to their exertions, and wrought up their minds to the highest pitch of expectation and excitement. And, in imagination, new farms were already purchased; old ones richly stocked and improved; new houses built and finished; wives were rustling in their new silk gowns; tables were groaning with dainties, and hundreds were lavished with a free hand, in treats, by embryo captains of militia, or justices of the peace, on the occasion of their promotion — honors which their great wealth would certainly bring to them. Thus with lusty blows, and many a gleeful joke, they delved on till about midnight.

Gow now made another trial with his rods; and, after essaying them some time, from different points, with great seeming carefulness and accuracy, he rose, with a satisfied air, and hastily throwing them aside, as things whose aid was now no longer required, he joyfully announced to his associates, that the hour which was to crown their labors with success was at last arrived, but that it was the hour, likewise, that would, very probably, put all their prudence and fortitude to the severest trial; for he must now apprise them, that in those cases where any murder or other great wickedness had been committed in connection with secreting a treasure, there was generally considerable difficulty in securing it, even after it was fairly discovered, owing to the strange sights and noises which were seen and heard about the time of reaching and attempting to seize it. But these sounds or apparitions, as startling and terrible as they might seem, would hurt nobody, nor prevent securing the money, if no attention was paid to them; while if the attention, at that critical moment, was suffered to be diverted, and the eye withdrawn from the spot, the money, some how or other, was almost sure to get away, or be so lost sight of that it could not be found again, without a new course of digging and experiments. This, to be sure, might not be a case where any such difficulty would occur, but it is always best to be prepared for the worst; and, therefore, the instant it was announced that the money was reached, every man must have all his senses about him, and confine them to the spot; and on no account look off or suffer a glance, or thought, to stray to what might be doing around him, but grapple at the treasure, as soon as it was laid open, in whatever shape it be found, and hang on for life, though the very devil might be yelling about his ears. With this startling caution, he ordered the men to dig away the inequalities of the bottom, and level off a broad space where they had last been digging. With nerves agitated by fear and expectation, they hurriedly went to work, and soon smoothed down a space sufficiently broad to meet the mind of their leader. He then formed them in a circle around him, and taking a heavy crowbar, and ordering every eye to be fixed intensely on the spot where he should strike, and if any signs of hitting the money followed, to dig for their lives, he lifted high the heavy weapon, and thrust it deep into the ground. A sharp, grating sound, as of the deadened clinking of metals under ground, followed the blow. And a low, eager, suppressed shout of exultation simultaneously escaped from the lips of all the company; while, almost at the same instant, a deep, unearthly groan issued from the nearest thicket, striking the ear with horrible distinctness, and causing every heart to quake with apprehension. Gow quickly repeated his blow, and it was again followed by the same cheering sound from the earth, and the same, and still more startling groan from the thicket.

"Now dig!—dig for your very lives!" sternly exclaimed Gow. Rallying their sinking courage at the command, they fell furiously to work, throwing the earth in every direction by their vague and random blows, and seemingly trying to stifle their fears by the desperate energy of their efforts, as nearer and more terrific grew the fearful sounds around them. Still managing, however, to keep their eyes on the work, though scarcely able to control the movements of their shaking and quaking limbs, they soon laid bare what they took to be the iron chest containing their prize.

"The lid! the lid! seize and raise the lid!" cried Gow; "and let every eye be upon the spot!" So saying, he seized a bar, and thrusting it under the supposed lid, raised one side of it several inches from its bed, when the sight of rusty dollars beneath, dimly glittering in the feeble light of their torch, greeted their enraptured sight. "There! there it is!" shouted the men. "Up with the lid then, and seize it!" cried Gow. One of them accordingly grappled with the lid, and had raised it nearly upright; when, in the act of stooping, involuntarily casting a look through his arms back on the bank behind them, he gave a shriek of terror, which turned all eyes to the spot indicated by his wild gestures. On the bank above them, at a few yards distant, stood an apparition, which made the blood curdle in their veins — the figure of an old man, his head and arms bare, and his long hair of milky whiteness streaming down over his shoulders, one of his skeleton arms thrown aloft, and the other pointing to his bloody throat, which seemed to be cut from ear to ear; while from his sunken sockets his eyes shone like two burning coals, and from his mouth a blue flame appeared to issue, showing long rows of spike-fashioned teeth, glowing like red-hot iron. "Seize the money!" vociferated Gow, at the same time plunging his hands under the lid. Partially roused by the words of their leader, the appalled and horror-struck men were making a confused motion to follow his example; when the apparition, seizing their torch and whirling it wide into the bushes, leaped with a hideous screech directly upon them. Tumbling one over another, in the darkness and confusion, all but Gow sprang wildly up the bank and fled from the spot like frighted sheep from beneath the crash of a falling thunderbolt, — some running against trees, which threw them back stunned and nearly senseless on the ground by the shock — some tumbling over logs, and there lying in breathless stillness — and some fleeing and hiding themselves in distant thickets, till his infernal majesty, as they verily believed him, should be pleased to take his departure. All was now dark and silent as the tomb. Gow, however, who had fearlessly remained on the spot, either because he had more nerve than his associates, or because he was better acquainted with his majesty, soon found his way to the decayed fire, kept for lighting their torches, and lighting up a fresh knot, proceeded to the spot, from which the company had been so strangely driven, and put things in such a situation as best comported with his purposes. After which, he began to call loudly to his men to return, as the ghost, or whatever it was, that had spoiled their game, was gone, and there was no further danger, he assured them, of his appearing that night. One by one, the men came creeping cautiously and stealthily from their hiding-places; and all, at length, were again assembled on the bank of the excavation. After being a little reassured by the words of their leader, and the presence of one another, they all proceeded to the spot, where they had last seen the supposed chest; but no appearance of either chest or money remained, and a little loose earth gave the only indication of the spot where they had discovered it. "The game is all up for to-night, as I supposed," observed Gow, after thrusting down a stick a few times. "The game is up for this time; and now you see what you have lost by not attending to my cautions, and keeping better command of yourselves, when it was all nothing but an empty apparition — the mere shadow of some old codger, that has been dead and rotten these hundred years, and that could have neither hurt you nor been felt by any body."

"Don't know zackly about that, captain," interrupted one — "he grabbed my leg, as I was springing up the bank there, I'll swear to ye; and if I hadn't kicked him off, he'd a carried me under where the chist is, fur zino."

"Yes, and he chased me like thunder, way out there in the woods," said another, his teeth still chattering from fright; "and gave me a lick over the head, that knocked me down, stiff as a tomcod; and here's the marks on't now," he continued, rubbing and showing his forehead, which had been barked by running against a tree.

"He came from a brimstone country, any how; for I smelt it as plain as day — and seems to me I can smell it now," observed a third, snuffing and turning his nose round in different directions.

"How like a painter he bellowed and screeched it, jest as he jumped!" exclaimed a fourth; "I vow, it made my hair stand up so stiff it shoved my hat off!"

"And what eyes!" added a fifth; "my stars, how they glared! If that are thing wasn't the devil, no matter!"

"Pshaw! pshaw!" said Gow, "all nonsense, I assure you. This is all nothing to what I have met with at such times; and you yourselves will be convinced of it by the time we have had another such bout — but now let us see how much we did get."

They then, taking a smooth place without the excavation, proceeded to produce and count the few dollars they had seized when driven from their hold on the treasure. Gow and Martin, it appeared, were the only ones who were successful in fairly getting hold of any; each of whom had grasped and retained a single handful of bona fide dollars, amounting to thirty in number. Of this there could be no mistake, for they were spread before them, and, though a little rusty, as might be expected, were yet, to all appearance, genuine Spanish coin; furnishing indubitable evidence to those who might have hitherto entertained doubts of the existence of the treasure that money was here, and, with proper management, might be secured. And this cheering thought, with the assurances of their leader that there would be no difficulty in again finding the chest, with one or two nights' digging, and that these disturbances to frighten them away were comparatively light after the first ordeal, raised their spirits almost to their former level; and, as they sat in a ring round the fire, with an occasional glance of wildness, and sometimes a convulsive start, the lingering effects of their recent fright, eagerly handling and eyeing the dollars, like scared children who had been appeased with toys, they began once more to crack their jokes over their strange adventure, and again grow rich, in the prospects of another trial for the slippery treasure.

Taking advantage of this state of feeling, and the renewed expectations which he had succeeded in raising in their minds, Gow now told them, as the treasure had been discovered, and the first dollar found, the contingency had therefore happened which entitled him to a hundred dollars from each; and gave them to understand that he expected their immediate compliance with their bargain. To this, after some demurring, and a few manifestations of reluctance, they finally assented; and producing their money, they, with the exception of Martin, paid him on the spot. And this business being adjusted, and an arrangement made to commence operations again as soon as the situation of the treasure could be ascertained by experiments, the band separated for the night — the men to dream of devils and pots of money, and their artful leader to hug the reality of five hundred dollars.

CHAPTER VIII.

"But from the cloud, hope like a meteor gleamed."

Let us now return to the disconsolate girl, whom we left sinking under the accumulated load of distress occasioned by the supposed desertion of one lover, in whom she had centred her every hope of happiness, and whose image she had inwrapped in her very heart's core, and the fresh and deeply-abetted persecutions of another, the object of her rooted dislike and suspicion, whose presence, even, was painful and perplexing to her feelings. After the interview, at which May received the letter so astounding to her hopes and long-cherished affections, Martin carried into immediate effect the preliminaries of marriage recommended and urged by his bold and determined associate. And the banns were accordingly published, the next Sunday, at the village, and the attendance of the minister bespoken to celebrate the nuptials one week from the Tuesday evening next succeeding the publishment.

May, in the mean time, the person above all others the most interested in this movement, had never been in the least consulted, but kept in entire ignorance of its existence; and never dreaming that any immediate advantage would be taken of a promise, made on condition of a desertion which, in her unbounded confidence, she believed could never happen, and which, as she now suspected, was artfully exacted by Martin with a knowledge previously received, from some source or other, of Ashley's defection; or that any thing would be tortured into a consent, which she subsequently uttered in her grief and agitation at the intelligence, by which that confidence, as well as all her happiness, was swept away at a blow; and wholly unsuspecting, indeed, of the measures which had been taken, and which had made such fearful progress towards disposing of her to one she so thoroughly detested,—she continued, several days, drooping in listless apathy to all that was passing around her, brooding over her griefs with feelings of anguish to be imagined only by those whose sensibilities have received a similar shock, or, looking forward to the chill and dreary future, there to find no ray of consolation to compensate for the settled and heart-blighting woe of the present. And it was not till two or three days after the event, that she accidentally overheard, in a conversation between her mother and a neighbor, who had called at the door, that the intention of marriage between herself and Gow had been publicly proclaimed the preceding Sunday, and that not a week intervened before the fatal day fixed on for its consummation. The poor girl, as well she might be, was petrified with astonishment, and filled with mingled emotions of dread and indignation at the discovery. As great, however, as was her dismay at the dreaded fate which she saw preparing for her,—as deep as was her indignation at the effrontery of Gow, and the baseness of those who had sanctioned his conduct,—she made no outcry, uttered no word of alarm or reproach, questioned no one, called no one to her counsel, nor even hinted that she was apprised of what was in progress; for where should she go for succor or advice? The friend and more than friend, on whom she had all along relied to return soon enough to relieve her from her troubles before any measure of actual compulsion should be used, had now cruelly deserted, and left her unsupported in heart, and friendless and unprotected in her extremities. The neighbors, if the delicacy of her feelings would permit her to apply to them, were indifferent, or against her, or at best would have no power to relieve her — and her parents, who should be her friendly advisers and protectors, she well knew were, instead, the abetters if not the prime movers of all that had been done. She saw, at a glance, how she had been entrapped — how the advantage she had unwittingly given them had been seized on as a pretended excuse for the steps they had taken; and she could easily foresee that this would furnish them with the same plea, as false, hypocritical, and base, as their consciences must tell them it was, for forcing her on, till she was irretrievably bound in by their toils. And although she knew not half the extent of their baseness and treachery, she yet knew enough to fill her with dread for the result of their machinations, and cause her nearly to despair of being able to extricate herself from the snares by which they had beset her. And yet she, at times, looked on the fate that now seemed rapidly approaching, dreaded as it had been, and still was, to her sober reflection, with an indifference and apathy of feeling, which one week before would have astonished even herself. There was a strange, wayward feeling, that occasionally came, mingling in the perturbed tumult of her mind, and seemed half to court the very fate she would avoid. Why should she care now, it said, what became of her? — life was now forever a blank to her, and no happiness was to be saved by avoiding her doom. And offended pride then resentfully threw in her plea, "*He* might have saved all this — he has cruelly deserted me in the hour of need, and that desertion, besides withering my heart to its core, has thrown me into the snares of a villain. How the thought, when he hears of my fate, will sharpen the stings of conscience, that must goad him for his conduct! But what will he care," she said, her better feelings again predominating — "what will he care *now* for the wretched, wretched girl?" And her tears streamed afresh at the sickening answer her mind despairingly responded. "Destroy thyself," whispered the tempter. Starting at the obtruding thought, she fell upon her knees, and poured out her heart to her God, besought him to banish these dreadful feelings from her bosom, and implored his divine assistance in snatching her from the threatening peril, and restoring her to tranquillity. She arose, meek and calmed, from the devotion, and took her Bible, there to find some balm for her bruised spirit. She opened upon a paper on which she recollected some time before to have penned a sentiment, and left it unfinished while hesitating in the choice of a word. Her attention immediately became riveted to the writing. The words were repeated below on the same paper, and in her own hand, apparently, with the lacking word supplied. "When could I have done this?" she asked herself, in surprise. "And that word, too, which I could not recall; that is here — it cannot be, and yet it is my own hand." She cast her eye still farther down, where she had written her name, *May Martin.* This also she remembered to have done once; but here it was repeated a dozen times, and last of all was written *May Gow.* "I *never* coupled those two names together!" she exclaimed, starting up, while a flash of light broke in on her mind, that made her clap her hands for joy. The Bible had, till within a day or two, lain in the window, in a room where Gow had often been alone — pen and ink were always there — he must have done it, and for the purpose of learning to counterfeit her hand, — and how well he has succeeded! But if he could do this, why not also have written the letter he had received purporting to be from Ashley — he did, he did! As this rapid process ran through her mind to the conclusion, she flew to the pretended letter from Ashley — compared all the little peculiarities of the hand to the writing just discovered, and doubted no longer. "It is, it is so! He did write me — Martin gave the villain the letter, and he kept it, and by it counterfeited the hand in the letter they gave me. O, a mountain is off my heart! Ashley, my dear Ashley, is still faithful! O, how could I ever have doubted him! But I will now live — now save myself for him — in spite of them all I will do it, and hesitate no longer about exposing this wretch, and bringing him to punishment." Such were the exclamations of May, as she paced the room in a delirium of joy. It was her first thought to write immediately to her lover, and she had seized a sheet for the purpose; but a second thought suggested that the real letter might, after all, have contained something similar to what she had received, or at least something, which, if she had it, would materially vary what she was about to write, and that she had better defer her purpose till she thought over the possibilities of obtaining it. She reasoned that the letter was still in existence, as Gow would keep it, thinking he might have occasion to counterfeit the hand again, in the prosecution of his designs — that he probably would not carry it about his person, for fear of losing or accidentally exposing it, and that it was, doubtless, now in his cabin in the woods, and most likely left unconcealed, as she had gathered from various intimations that he staid there alone, and that no one ever presumed to approach his retreat. And having already pretty well ascertained that the employment of Gow and his associates in the woods was that of digging money or precious ores, which she supposed he had persuaded them to believe could be found there, and knowing that he must necessarily be absent from his cabin whenever they were engaged in digging, which, from Martin's going and returning, she had learnt was the first part of the night, she, not thinking of any one whom she could employ for the purpose, conceived the bold project of going herself into the mountain, by night, after the family had retired, and of attempting to get possession of the letter. But how should she ascertain where this cabin or shanty was situated? In her younger years, she had often, and with delight, rambled through the woods with her mates in search of nuts, or medicinal roots and herbs, for the yearly supply of the family. She knew well the whole tract of forest back to the mountains, and even a portion of them she had occasionally ascended — but how was this to enable her to find in the night a place which was not known even to the associates of the man, who from no creditable motives, she suspected, had thus carefully concealed his retreat? She knew not; but her discovery had given a new impulse to her life, rousing every thought and energy of her soul into action, and so far from yielding to the obstacle, her mind became busied in expedients to overcome it.

There was in the neighborhood a boy, of about fifteen years of age, known by the appellation of Shrewd David, the prefix of which was gained him by his uncommon sagacity and keenness of observation of all that was passing around him. Being the son of a poor widow by the name of Butler, who, supporting herself by her loom and needle, and having no business for the boy except to take care of her cow and procure her wood, had left him mostly to shift for himself; and although bred in ignorance, yet for doing an errand, riding for the doctor, in cases of great emergency, or going as an express on affairs requiring secrecy and prudence, he had acquired a character for great despatch, skill, and fidelity; and as for finding a sheep or kine, strayed and lost in the woods, or the more daring feats of seeking out the retreat of a mischievous bear or wolf, none were equal to Shrewd David; for, naturally intrepid, nimble and active as a squirrel, which he delighted to follow to the tops of the highest trees, and crafty in expedients as the doubling fox, which, with the keenness of the greyhound's sight, and almost the fleetness, he often drove to the long-eluded burrow, there was scarcely a rood of mountain or moorland in the settlement with which he was not familiar. Among others, he had several times been employed by Ashley as an assistant in his surveys in the woods; and May had often heard her lover speak in the highest terms of the capacity and honesty of the hardy little woodsman.

As our heroine sat by her window facing the garden at the back of the house, her mind absorbed in devising means for accomplishing the object on which we left her pondering, her eye caught the form of the boy just described, sitting on a rock and fishing for trout, in a brook which ran by the house just without the enclosure of the garden; and the thought instantly occurred to her that he would be a useful and trusty assistant in effecting the object she had in view. Full of this idea, she immediately repaired to the fence opposite, and within a few feet of the spot where the boy was sitting.

"Come, trout," he was saying to himself, as he sat so deeply engrossed in his tantalizing employment as not to have heeded the noiseless approach of his visitor — "come, come, trouty, I gives you a fair invite to be at my breakfast to-morrow morning; and I knows you are aching to snap at that worm, as bad as I am to have you; so out from under the rock with you, in a jiffin. Well, now, blast your scary picture, I guesses I can wait as long as you can, any how."

"What luck to-day, David?" at length asked May, hesitating to interrupt him in his soliloquy.

"Why," exclaimed the boy, rapidly throwing the glances of his keen gray eyes about him, till they settled on his fair interrogator — "why, Miss May! dog my cat, but you half scares me! What luck? O, not much — the flies are getting so thick, that the fishes begin to think they can get their dinners at a cheaper rate than I offers them."

" But you like the employment, don't you, David ? "

" O, yes, when they ain't so dainty about their victuals — but rather dull music now. I loves better to be scrambling over the mountains with Mr. Ashley. When will he come back ? But they say he ain't a comin back ever."

" I am sure — I expect — that is, I hope he will return, David," replied May, blushing, and hesitating at being brought so very abruptly to the very subject she had at heart.

" Why, mother says he sent a letter about marrying another girl; and they all say you are going to marry that Mister Gow, that folks think is such a wonderful man, — and was published last Sunday."

" I have just heard that I was published."

" Just heard ! — now that's a good one, Miss May."

" David ! "

" What ? "

" Could I trust you with a secret ? "

" What secret ? "

" Why, if I wished to engage your assistance in some affair that I had reasons for keeping secret, would you try to oblige me, and keep it to yourself ? "

" I mought, and then I mought not again," replied the boy, with a droll, shrewd, half-serious and half-joking expression. " I jumps at the chance a month agone; but the fact is, Miss May, when I hears you are going to have that Mister Gow, I don't like you so well as I wants to."

" Well, David, I don't blame you for it ; but if that is all you dislike in me, we can be friends again at once ; for I can assure you I will never marry Gow, if there is any way to prevent it."

" Good now ! " exclaimed he, jumping up with animation, and throwing down his fish pole hard upon the rock, — " there ! see that pesky trout whipping off ! " he continued, in an under tone, pointing into the brook.

" But why, David, should *you* care about my marrying Gow ? "

" Because I hates him. You see I likes to know what's going on, and goes one day to the mountain and finds where they digs a nights for money. Well, while I looks about there, guessing it all out, down comes that mister, with a switch in one hand behind him, and afore I thinks any thing's to pay, gives me two or three tough ones, right over my head, and says, ' Now keep off, you little himp, or I cuts you into mince meat.' But David Butler is not made of wood — he remembers and thinks. So I watches every thing, and soon makes up my mind that he's a black one, trying to tomfool the folks, and get away their money — for I finds they've been round borrowing money ; and what for is it ? They don't want it to make their potatoes grow, I guesses. And what for is it, too, that he wants to be alone there in the mountains, where nobody must see his place ? "

" True, true, David — shrewd they rightly call you — I, too, have suspected nearly all this, and still know something besides of the fellow. And now will you keep my secret and engage for me ? It is this same villain that I want you to assist me in defeating. Will you promise ? "

" Yes, Miss May, I promises now, and what I says I does."

" Well, David, I have discovered, as I think, that the letter you heard of was made up by Gow to deceive me, and make me listen to his offers."

"Zounds! I'd fix him. And Mr. Ashley didn't write any letter?"

"Yes, I am satisfied he did; for Gow could have had no other means of counterfeiting Mr. Ashley's hand. Mr. Martin took the letter from the office, and gave it to Gow, who, I feel very sure, has still got it, and keeps it laid away in his place in the mountain. Do you know, David, where this is."

"I guesses pretty close at it. I thinks it is the old cave that Mr. Ashley and I once finds in coming over the mountain. I sees, almost every night, just after dark, a little glim of light away up there, just peeping through the trees."

"Is there such a place? That is doubtless it, then. Now, David, can you go and get me the letter?"

"What! in the daytime? He's always there, and won't let me have it."

"No, in the night, when he's away with the diggers."

"May be the old man's there. They do say, Miss May, he's the old one himself, helping them dig money with the black art. I'd go for you and take a bear out of a trap, if 'twas as dark as a nigger's pocket; for I always knows how to fight such like,—but the old one!—I fears to go alone, cause of he."

"But if I would go with you?" said May, smiling at his superstitious fears, but thinking it would be useless to combat them.

"You! you, Miss May?"

"Yes, David, I will go, this very night, as soon as mother 's asleep—they have not been digging for several nights past; but I overheard Mr. Martin say they were going to begin again to-night; and Gow of course will be absent from his cave. Will you come, go with me, and guide me to the place ? "

" I goes," said the little fellow, plucking up — " the old one never comes near if you be there, Miss May, and I fears nothing else."

" Well, then, meet me at this spot to-night, as soon as you see the light put out in mother's room ; and though it is out of my power to pay you now, David, I will some day or other see you handsomely rewarded."

" I works for pay sometimes, cause mother's poor — but I likes Mr. Ashley, and I likes you, now — and I goes just as well for likes as money."

So saying, and gathering himself up proudly, the little fellow took his fishing implements and hastily moved off, as if his excited feelings were hurrying him away to prepare for the expedition.

" Don't forget to be here to-night in season," said May, calling after him.

" I never forgets any thing," replied the boy, increasing his pace.

Our heroine now returned to her domestic avocations, in a state of the highest excitement, created by her newly-raised hopes, and the thoughts of her projected adventure, and impatiently awaited the time set for undertaking it. It was her first object to obtain her letter ; but although her great anxiety for its possession had prompted to this bold, and, to a female situated as she was, somewhat hazardous enterprise, she yet had other inducements to visit the cavern. She highly suspected Gow of deep and complicated villany, and thought it not improbable that something might there be discovered which would enable her to unmask him ; for, if any of his deeds had rendered him obnoxious to punishment, she, in view of justice and public good, as well as her own wrongs and her own safety, was fully determined to expose him, by every means in her power, believing this was now not only due from her, but the surest, and perhaps the only way she could escape from the dreadful fate which seemed so menacingly impending over her unprotected head.

CHAPTER IX.

"Who for others prepare
A trap should beware
That they do not themselves fall into the snare."

At the appointed hour, May repaired to the spot agreed on, in the garden, and found her sturdy little guide already there, patiently awaiting her arrival.

"Ah, ha! Miss May," said David, cautiously peering about — "up to the chalk, after all! that's a brave one, for a lady — I guesses, all the afternoon, as how you'd flummux, when it come dark."

"Not so easily frightened, David. Are you ready? Lead on, then."

On this, they silently set forward across the fields, and soon reached the woods. Before entering them, however, the boy, proposing a halt, mounted several tall stumps successively, for the purpose of obtaining an observation; and having at last succeeded, he returned to the side of his companion and observed, —

"I sees a little twinkle up there, once in a while — there! I sees it from here now — here, look where I points — do you see it now?"

"Ah, yes, I did catch it then."

"Well, that's the place — about half a mile off — I knows a good cow path to the mountain — but when we gets there, I knows but one way to the cave — nation bad and steep, too, Miss May; but I finds the way, for all the dark — and here, feel the end of this cord; I brings it for you to hang on to, so you don't get lost in the bushes. And now, Miss May, if you isn't afeard, I leads you to the spot; I guesses that Mister has come down among the diggers, by this time, for I watches and sees *them* going afore I comes for you. So now, if the old man isn't there, we finds a clear run and no snakes."

"David," said May, not knowing how far the boy's hobgoblin fears might carry him, in case they met any one, and being aware how much depended on him in the adventure, "you have very wrong notions about this old man who has been seen about here; he is either some poor, crazy vagabond, or else a brother rogue of Gow; but, at all events, nothing more than a man."

"O, I fears nothing for him; cause if he be the old one, when he sees you, Miss May, he clears out in a hurry."

The boy now plunged into the woods, followed by his daring companion, and, striking into the path, proceeded slowly and cautiously on to the foot of the mountain, at some little distance from where the money diggers were assembling for their night's operations.

It was the same night which we have already described as proving so exciting and fearful to these enthusiasts in searching for the buried mammon — we having found it most convenient, in describing their operations, to go forward of the events of the other part of our narrative.

The night was unusually dark; and the thick mass of the full-grown foliage of the heavy, overhanging forest, completely shutting out the faint suffusions of the sky light, which was scarcely perceptible even in the open field, and adding a still deeper shade to the ordinary darkness, no common or unaccustomed hand could have succeeded in advancing in the woods at all, much less in reaching any given point at a distance; but Shrewd David, familiar with every peculiar tree, every turn of the path, and every inequality of the ground, and possessed of a vision uncommonly acute, carrying a long stick in his hand to apprise him of each interposing obstacle, while his bare feet informed him, by the feel, of the first step's deviation from the slightly-trod path, threaded the difficult way with surprising accuracy, finding but little trouble for himself, and kindly endeavoring, by removing every limb or bush from the way, and timely notifying her of every log or other obstacle to be surmounted, to aid his less practised companion in her more embarrassed progress.

Sometimes the resolution of May for a moment wavered, and her heart almost misgave her, at the boldness of her own undertaking, and the difficulties of its accomplishment; but a sense of her own wrongs as often occurring to rouse her bosom to resistance, and the thoughts of what must soon be her fate without a perseverance in her plans impelling her onward to action, bore up her courage through all, and tempered her usually mild spirit with an energy adequate to the trying emergency.

They at length arrived at the foot of the here steeply-ascending mountain. David now again came to a halt, for the purpose of ascertaining his bearings and finding the most feasible place for climbing the ascent. After groping about a while, he returned, and, informing May that he had succeeded in finding the place where he intended to go up, he led her to the spot.

"Now, Miss May," he said, in a low, cautious tone, "now for the tougher! I listens and just hears the diggers at their work — not a great ways off from here, they are now — that mister, I guesses, has come down afore this; but if he ain't, and we meets him, I hears him coming time enough; and when I gives three jerks of the cord, you must slink under a bush or something, and lie still as a mouse, and I does the same, till he gets by. So now lets pull for it."

"Bless me!" said May, being just able to discern the dark outline of the steep which rose like the wall of a house before her — "bless me, David, we haven't got to climb up here?"

"Yes, no other way for it — but never mind, we goes it — and I tells you what, Miss May, you tie the end of the cord round you, like I've done — there! now let them white hands work for their living — I seizes at the roots and bushes along up; and if you pulls me back, you must be stronger than that pesky old bear that grappled hold of my trousers last summer, just as I springs and scrambles up a sapling to get out of the way of her."

With this they commenced their laborious and difficult task of climbing the mountain.

Slowly clambering from tree to tree, and rock to rock, our sturdy and active little mountaineer, followed by his scarcely less agile and resolute companion, continued to work his way several hundred feet up the almost perpendicular ascent, till they came to a narrow level, beyond which an upright and wall-like ledge interposed an insurmountable obstacle to their proceeding any farther in the direction they had been pursuing.

"Ah! I remembers this cute place," whispered David, as they both dropped down on a mossy rock, on reaching the summit, through sheer exhaustion from the severity of their struggles. "I remembers this — we are most there now — only go along a piece on this level till we comes to the end, and then, when we mounts another rock, and just gets round a point of a ledge, there's the cave — no trouble but we finds it, cause see! there's more light, now we've got above the tops of the trees, down there below."

Our adventurers again set forward along the scanty shelf towards the north, keeping as near to the ledgy barrier, on the left, as possible, as on the right, and often within a yard of their feet, yawned the black and fearful chasm of the precipice, here falling down perpendicularly some hundred feet beneath them. They soon, however, and safely, reached the termination of their walk in this direction. For at this place, while the shelf along which, for nearly a hundred yards, they had now passed, considerably widened, a tall rock shot out boldly from the ledge on the left, forming a rectangular area of several square rods of level surface, in the corner of which stood a small tree, whose branches overtopped the ledge above, here not more than ten feet in height.

"There! Miss May," said the little guide, "when we gets up a top of this, we are within a few rods of the place where the mister stays, as I now feels sure, cause I finds the twigs and bushes broke off along back there, where he brushes by in going and coming; and I knows well enough nobody else comes to this mortal place."

"Yes, David, but how are we ever to get up there?"

"Why, I supposed all the time that he'd a fixed up some contrivance to get up and down; but I sees none.

When Mr. Ashley and I come down, we gets up into the top of that tree; but you can't climb, can you, Miss May?"

"I never tried it, David, I believe, or, at least, not lately; but is there no other way?"

"Stay a bit—let's see a little," replied the boy. So saying, and passing along the base of the ledge, he soon announced that he saw something projecting over the top of the rock, which he thought to be some kind of a ladder. And now, nimbly mounting the tree, and jumping on to the rock, he proceeded to let down the contrivance he had discovered, which proved to be a light ladder, composed of two poles distended at the ends by split sticks, with strong bark ropes confined at proper intervals to the sides to serve in lieu of rounds. Our heroine courageously mounted, and soon stood at the side of her companion on the top of the rock. Here they found another small level, nearly enclosed by another and still loftier ledge of rocks. After pulling up and carefully adjusting the ladder in its original position, David proposed, as, from finding the ladder at the top, Gow might still be in the cave, to leave May under a projecting cliff, and go round the point of the ledge, which only intervened between them and the cave, for the purpose of reconnoitring the spot. Accordingly he noiselessly slunk away; and after a short absence, he returned, and creeping close up to May, he put his mouth to her ear, and whispered,—

"Sure as guns, Miss May, they be there yet!"

"They!" repeated the other with some agitation,—"they! who? are there two of them?"

"Yes, the mister, and another oldish man, who I almost thinks must be the old man himself; though for certain he ain't got the same awful queer face on now that he had when I gets a peep at him one day in the edge of the woods. They've built out a sort of place with stakes and bark right afore the cave, so as to make it come all in one room ; so I creeps up behind, and gets a look at em through the holes."

" Ah, ha!" mused May, "this old man then wears a disguise — he is beyond all doubt an associate of Gow. But what is to be done now, David?"

" Why, I thinks we better creep round where I did, so as to be on the back side, cause I expects the mister, and may be tother one, comes this way soon now, to go down to the diggers ; and if they takes a light, they see us ; but if we goes round there, they won't go that way for any thing, I guesses; and if they do, we can slink off into the bushes ; for there's a clear run that way. So we better get round there, and wait till they goes, or we gives it up."

May at once falling in with this advice, our adventurers proceeded, with the utmost silence and caution, round the projecting point, and immediately found themselves directly in front of, and not twenty yards from the entrance of the cavern. Voices were now distinctly heard within; while a portion of light escaped through the narrow entrance, which was stopped by setting a broad piece of bark upright on the inner side before it. With a slight shudder May obeyed the motions of her guide, and they passed on, keeping as great a distance from the cave as the still-continued precipice on the right would safely permit, and soon reached a spot where the offset of the ledge forming the cave seemed to terminate, leaving an opening of only a gentle rise up the mountain. Here, safe from discovery, they sat down to watch the movements of the inmates of the cave, the new addition, or front of which, was still in plain sight.

"See that little streak of light through the side there, Miss May? Well, there's where I gets my peep. Suppose now you creeps up and tries it, and I comes after you gets still."

"Can I do it without danger of being heard?"

"Yes, if you feels every place where you puts your foot down, to see that there's no dry brush or leaves to make a noise."

Another moment and our heroine was gliding silently to the spot—another, and she was breathlessly seeing and hearing all that was passing within. The two worthies were seated on a rude bench, made of a cleft log, placed before a small fire, built just without the entrance of the natural cave, so as to afford the smoke a chance to escape through the opening left in the bark roof above.

"Let's see, to-day is Thursday," observed the elder, a man apparently about fifty, the first to break silence after May's arrival at her loophole. "To-day is Thursday—next Tuesday evening brings your concern to a focus, hey?"

"Next Tuesday, my old boy, is the day that gives me as smart a little jade of a wife as ever handled broomstick—together with all the appurtenances thereunto belonging, as my old dad's parchment used to run."

"Ay, ay, the appurtenances after division, remember! As to the wife, she should have been named last; she is but the incumbrance."

"Why, as for that, Col., she is really so smooth a piece, that I think I can stick to, and be quite husband-like for a year or so; and by that time I intend to have all said appurtenances in the shape of cash in my pocket. After which I shall probably be ready for a little high life, by way of adventures, again."

"Having duly and impartially divided —"

"What a suspicious devil you are, Col.! Yes, yes, I am honest, and honor bright in this business, depend on't."

"Really! — you well know how I can help myself, if you don't walk straight, my conscientious lad."

"Come, none of your threatening — I can do as much even at that as you can, I am thinking. But as to this affair, I freely say you will be well entitled to share the plunder, let it be as much as it may; for you first started the project, and gave me the chance. But how, Col., did you happen to find out that the old man made such a will? You never told me exactly, I think."

"Why, hearing that the old man was confined, and all others there, who formerly knew me, dead or removed, I ventured to spend some months in town; and remaining there till after the old fellow popped off, when the subject of his family and estate was a good deal talked of, I happened one day to overhear a lawyer, who drew the will, telling a friend all the particulars. He said Frank had written home a penitent letter, informing his father of his private marriage in the days of his wild oats, long before he went abroad, and that though his wife died at the birth of her first child, yet that child probably was still living, having been left with some family in the north part of New Hampshire, and winding off by asking the old man's forgiveness, and hoping he would provide for his child, a daughter, he was told. On which the old man forgot all his temper — threw the old will, cutting Frank off, into the fire — made a new one, giving him all his property except these legacies, in case the girl was alive. I afterwards went to the register's office myself, and under some pretence or other, got a peep at the will, and found it as I had heard. It was then, knowing Frank would come home from France as soon as he heard of his father's death, to take possession of his estate, I hunted you up, and put you on this scheme so as to have all done before his return."

"And all shall be done, my precious old match-maker; but my very good friends, the money diggers, are by this time on the ground below, and doubtless impatient for my coming — I must be off. Let's see, how many of your salt and water rusty dollars did you bury there?"

"Just thirty, I believe."

"Five apiece, hey? Zounds! how the fellows will jump at the sight of 'em, if they *are* of domestic manufacture! — that is, if my very worthy friend, the devil, here, don't frighten 'em out of their senses."

"Yes, but you had better have heard to me, Gow, and put them off till the night before or after you are married. The fools, I am afraid, will go and pass some of their dollars; and then we stand an even chance to get blown up before you bring your affair to a point."

"Blown up! how? We get five hundred dollars of the *real* to-night, and as for what they dig up, *we* shall not pass it, and who can know where it comes from?"

"No, no, but they will some way or other connect it with you; and if they do suspect you, I tell you again, ten to one if it don't blow your marriage into moonshine."

"They won't pass it—our plan of secrecy, till they get fairly hold of the treasure, will prevent that; at least, till I secure my treasure, and the next day, under pretence of a short journey, I am off with my wife, you see; and you the same night, as soon as you find me fairly buckled, I suppose. But I must go—have you your disguise ready—the phosphorus for the eyes and mouth of your mask? Well, then, come on pretty soon—get a good position in the bushes near, and when I sing out—'*There's the money—seize it*'—then you—but you know how to manage."

With this, Gow, lighting a small pocket lantern, with which both he and his associate seemed provided, left the cabin, and May, who sat trembling with apprehension lest he should come round the corner and discover her, soon, to her great relief, heard him let down the ladder and descend. David, after Gow's departure, came crawling to the side of his companion, and now shared with her the crevice, in observing the movements of the remaining inmate of the place. The old man, on being left alone, soon sunk into a deep reverie, and sat so long, in his mute and motionless abstraction, that his silent and unsuspected observers began to fear that he intended to remain, or that he would fall asleep, and thus defeat their purpose of searching the interior. At last, however, rousing up and shaking off his seeming lethargy, he arose, went back into the cave, and brought out the different articles of his disguise for the part he was about to enact in the farce below. He then, taking up and fitting on a frightful-looking mask, turned round, protruding his long neck forward, first on one side, then another, as if practising attitudes and trying to hit on the most hideous.

“Wheugh! — wheu! —” went David, forcing out his breath in a sort of half whistle, and then suddenly checking himself, and relapsing into silence.

The old man next took from a little box and rubbed round the small outlets for the eyes and mouth what appeared to be a whitish substance, but which, as the shade occasionally fell on the face, shone like fire. Then taking off his coat, rolling his shirt sleeves up to his shoulders, and baring his neck, he drew some bright red ochre several times from ear to ear, giving his throat the appearance of having been cut across in a long, bloody gash. After which he put on an old, sleeveless shirt, apparently besmeared in spots of gore, and then surmounted this dress with a white horsehair wig, rising stiff and bristly on the top of the head, like a tuft of porcupine quills, and flowing down in long, snaky ringlets over his neck and shoulders below, making a whole as grotesque and hideous as could well be imagined. Having thus completed his equipment, he lit his lamp, and carefully raking up the fire, departed, to be ready for the performance, with which the reader has already been made acquainted.

“O, lightning!” exclaimed David, as soon as the receding footsteps of the man had died away on his ear, “the very dogskin that I sees by the woodside — I knows him the minute he gets his queer tother face on. Well, if I didn't think all the time he must be the old one! But now — twheugh! he's no more devil than I be.”

“I fear he is, David, in wickedness.”

“O, he's as bad as the old one, may be, — but what thinks you he's going to do, Miss May?”

“I have learnt their whole plot. You were right in your suspicions. These deliberate villains are about to defraud these men, whom they have duped with the idea of finding a treasure, out of a large sum of money, and are expecting to get hold of it to-night — I have also heard some very strange things about myself, I think it must be — which I may some time tell you. But now, David, let us proceed to the business for which we came — what I have been listening to had nearly driven it from my mind. If you will watch at the point of rocks yonder, to give me notice, should either of them return, I will go in myself, and see what can be found.

The boy readily complying, May now unhesitatingly entered the place just left by the unsuspecting foes of her happiness, who were little dreaming that, while with such confidence of success they were weaving the meshes of their toils for others, the least suspected of their intended victims, a poor, unfriended girl, had already fathomed their villanous designs, and was rapidly preparing a mine soon and fatally to explode beneath their feet. On entering the cabin, May kindled a bright fire, and proceeded to the search. Going at once into the interior of the rock, she came to a rude shelf on which were placed some articles of provisions, among which was a part of a loaf of bread of her own baking, while beneath, on the smooth stone floor, were ranged a plate or two, a few knives and forks, and the scanty utensils with which they prepared their food. Pausing a moment over these with womanly curiosity and criticism, she passed on, and soon came across sundry tools, the use of which she at first was at a loss to understand. A few imperfectly formed dollars, however, lying near, and now catching her eye, at once explained the mystery — they were a die and other implements for coining.

"Now," said she, exultingly, well aware of the penalties of counterfeiting, "now, at least, I have him in my power — but that for a last resort."

And she went on prying, in vain, into every place and corner, for the main object of her search, till she had nearly given up all hope of success. Turning to take one look more, however, before she went out the door, she espied a pocket inkstand and the corner of some writing paper protruding from a small opening or crevice in the rock, over the fire, which was not observable from other parts of the room. She flew to the spot, and by the aid of the bench placed slantingly against the rock, made shift to reach and draw out the loose paper, among the leaves of which was a crumpled and soiled letter. Hastily descending and holding it to the fire, she looked at the superscription — ran her eye quickly over a few lines here and there — glanced at the signature at the bottom, and, with an ejaculated "Thank Heaven!" eagerly thrust the precious prize into that female "receptacle of things lost on earth," the trusty bosom. Carefully replacing every thing as she found it, she hurriedly left the cave, and in another moment had announced her success and her discoveries to her companion, and with him was on her way homeward.

Another half hour found our heroine standing on the spot at the garden where she started, safe returned from the exciting and perilous adventures of the night, and giving directions to her trusty little friend to be there the next morning to take a letter to the village to her betrothed; to whom she could now pour out her soul with confidence as undoubting as the fresh-lit flame of her love was unquenchable.

We will not attempt to analyze or describe the tumultuous and mingled feelings that agitated the bosom of May after she found her head safely resting on her pillow on that eventful night. Now prayers of thankfulness, at her timely discovery of the plots of her enemies, were moving her lips — now tears of joy, at the possession of a prize bringing such happiness to her heart, were suffusing her sleepless eyes; and now various and tantalizing conjectures were racking her mind, as she deeply pondered on the vague and partial intelligence she had obtained concerning her own history, hitherto a blank to her, but now connected, she no longer doubted, with her present misfortunes, and giving rise to the motives of her tormentor's anxiety to force her into marriage — till her busy thoughts and varying emotions, gradually fading and sinking into chaos, became mingled and lost in the blank oblivion of the living death, which "nature's great restorer, balmy sleep," brings to the disturbed and weary.

CHAPTER X.

"The time shall come, nor long remote, when thou
Shalt feel more pangs than thou inflictest now."

The first dawning light of the next morning found May eagerly poring over the letter from her lover which she had, the last night, so luckily obtained. She found it all that she expected, and all that her heart desired. It told glowingly of his unabated affections, of his anxiety to clasp her in his arms, and wound off by expressing his hope and expectations of being able to return some weeks sooner than he told her at their parting. After she had finished the perusal, and before any one else was stirring in the house, she seized her pen and wrote a hasty letter to Ashley, briefly relating all that had occurred since his departure, and imploring him, as he loved — as he would save her — to fly to her relief.

Soon after breakfast, May caught a glance of her new ally coming, punctual to his appointment, carelessly fishing along up the brook to the old place of rendezvous, where he patiently awaited, behind the intervening shrubbery, the coming of his mistress, who soon found opportunity to steal away unobserved and approach him. Intrusting her letter to his care, to be given into the postmaster's own hand, she informed David that she had determined to get a delay of the time, set for the wedding, long enough to allow Ashley to reach there previous to the day to which she was in hopes of getting the wedding postponed. This was her first resort; and if this failed, she must then make use of the means which last night's adventure had given her; for, as much as the delicacy of her feelings recoiled at becoming the public accuser of Gow of a crime of which she was fearful that Martin, and perhaps others, would be implicated, she believed this the only way then left her of averting the now doubly-revolting destiny that awaited her. With this, and commissioning him to get some trifling articles at the village store, she dismissed her messenger, with directions to repair to the same spot on his return.

At Martin's return to the house for his noon meal, May, feeling herself impelled by the necessity of immediate action, and making an effort to overcome her reluctance to any further negotiation with one who had acted so treacherously towards her, gave him to understand that she was acquainted with all the steps he had taken as preliminary to his bestowing her on Gow, and besought him and his wife, in the most moving terms, to relinquish their cruel purpose. But she besought them in vain. They replied only, as she had anticipated, by now pleading not only her conditional promise, but what Martin termed her after consent, and insisted on her yielding without further ado. Perceiving any more entreaty on this point useless, she then begged a postponement for a few weeks. But this request received even less favor than the former; and although they had manifested no surprise when she apprised them of her knowledge of the publishment and the appointment of the day of wedding, believing, doubtless, she heard it from some neighbor, and being well pleased, probably, that they had thus been saved the task of making to her an announcement which they knew must soon be made, and which they could hardly put on the face to make — although they had shown no surprise in this, or her subsequent request, yet the moment she spoke of a delay, they started, exchanged glances of suspicion, and, without assigning the least reason for refusing to listen to what would have been, on their assumption of Ashley's desertion, neither dangerous to their purposes nor unreasonable in itself, pointedly denied her request, and in such bitterness of expression and unfeeling abuse as drove her again in tears from the room.

"He will have it so," said May, after sitting a while alone, indulging in grief and revolving in her mind the different chances now left for her escape from the threatened fate; "there is no other way short of exposing Gow and bringing him to justice; and if it involves Martin, the fault is not mine. Gladly, for all his baseness and cruelty, gladly would I save him from disgrace, and perhaps a prison, for having given me a home — once a kind home, however the bad passions may have since twisted his heart. But he will have it so; and now for the speediest method of bringing the character and crimes of that dark villain, Gow, to light."

Such was the stern resolution to which our heroine had reluctantly arrived. Gladly, as she said, would she, in remembrance of the past, and even in forgetfulness of the present, have averted from the head of her foster father the infamy which she had reason to believe would fall upon him in consequence of the measures she had now been driven to the alternative of adopting — joyfully have flown to him on her return from the mountain —

imparted her discoveries, and thus have saved him and herself from the consequences of Gow's villany, had she believed him only to be the innocent dupe of the other's artifice. But this she could scarcely believe, for, from the great intimacy obviously existing between the two, — from the part Martin had taken relative to the forged letter, and from his character for intrigue, low cunning, and avarice, which she knew to be his leading traits, — she drew the partially erroneous conclusion that they were confederates, not only in entrapping her, but in coining money and duping their other associates. Under these circumstances, therefore, every measure of this kind, she supposed, would be useless, and might be the means of defeating her own objects.

Towards night, Shrewd David returned from the village, and his employer again met him alone at the usual place.

" Well, David, I have had more troubles since I saw you; I have entirely failed in my attempt to gain time. But you delivered the letter — and there was nothing in the office for me ?"

" Yes! No!"

" O, if there could have been one! I did not much expect one, however. Did you recollect my little errand ?"

" The silk thread ? Yes, Miss May, here it is, in this paper."

May took the parcel from the boy, and, opening it, disengaged the silk from the wrapper. The latter was a printed paper, and she listlessly began running over the contents; when she soon started, as if finding something which had caused her some sudden emotion.

" Where did you get this paper, David ?" earnestly asked she, her eyes still riveted on the words before her.

" Why, the storekeeper puts it round the silk."

" Did he say where he obtained it? This is not such as they usually wrap their goods in — it is a printed handbill."

" Yes, I remembers now; he first says his wrapping paper's all out — then he goes to the door, swung back inside, and tears down a paper, and says, 'This has been here long enough,' and wraps the silk in it."

" Do you know how it reads, David?"

" No! I never opens it — what is it, Miss May, that makes you look so queer about it?"

" Now, David," she continued, after reading the description of the thief's person, and the horse he had abducted — " now tell me, have you ever seen such a person as is here described?"

" Why," replied the boy, after dropping his head in thought — " why, I think he must be that mister's own brother, it's so like him."

" Nearer home than that — it is Gow himself!"

" By zounds!"

" Yes, I know more than you do about this;" and she related the scene that she and her lover witnessed on Gow's first coming into the settlement.

" Sure it is, then," said the boy musingly, after she had ended. " But does them what tells where he is get the money?"

" Some of it, I presume; but this is little of my concern — those who will take him away shall be welcome to the reward, and as much more, if I had it to give them. No, no, not for the reward, but to get rid of him, is my anxiety. And I should prefer this way to any other for doing it, as it will take him at once out of the country, and involve nobody else. David, will you go again to the village to-morrow — take this to Mr. Mundle, the sheriff, and without making use of my name, inform him the thief is here; and tell him where, and how he may be taken?"

"I does it, by the pipers."

"And if they do not come on immediately after him, come here to-morrow night after dark, to inform me of your success."

The active little messenger, faithful to his trust, was at the village at an early hour the next day, and promptly seeking out Mundle, gave him the handbill, accompanying it with the information he was directed to give; but his communication was not received by the wary dealer in rogues with such cordiality and such ready confidence as he and his mistress had anticipated. The sheriff, being one of those shrewd and cautious men who must understand the motives, and see himself all the springs of action producing any given measure, before they make up any decided opinion concerning it, questioned the boy very closely relative to the causes of his coming; whether some one had not put him up to this, through enmity to the accused; thinking it rather strange that this discovery should not have been made before concerning a man who had been in the settlement so many weeks and who was, as the publishment the preceding Sunday at the village meeting apprised him, about to be married into one of the principal families of the former place, and deeming a knowledge of all this essential to any reliance on the lad's story, he himself having never seen Gow, and Ashley, the only witness referred to, being absent. But in endeavoring to conceal the name of his employer, as she directed, and disdaining to misrepresent, David's answers became confused, and finally he refused to reply to any more questions, still reiterating, however, that he knew Gow was a villain, and the one who stole the horse, which, having been to the spot on his way to the village, he said might still be seen in the bed of the brook, where the body was thrown, in such a state of preservation as to enable one to identify sundry marks described in the handbill.

"I wish you would tell me, my lad," said the sheriff, musingly, "who is at the bottom of this; but you may have good reasons, after all, for your conduct; for I have often heard of you, when I have been up in the neighborhood, as an honest, capable boy; and in a day or two I will inquire into this affair."

But David was not to be put off in this way. He still hung round the sheriff, and continued to urge his request to have something done immediately.

"Well, well, boy," said Mundle, at length, wearied by the importunity of the former, "we may as well see what steps can be taken, if your story be true, now, as ever; so go with me to Squire Johnson's."

They accordingly proceeded to the village justice, when the sheriff made known David's story, and the poor boy was again subjected to a close scrutiny by his honor, resulting, however, much the same as his previous examination. The justice and the sheriff then held a consultation apart. After which, the latter came and told David that as Gow had never been arrested in New Hampshire, where the horse was stolen, it was their opinion that they had no authority to take him till they had written on and obtained a warrant there; but that, as the justice thought he had once seen Gow in passing by Martin's some weeks before, and believed he would answer to the description of the handbill, they had concluded to go on with the business, which, if every thing was kept still, might be brought about in a week or ten days, and that, therefore, he had better now go home, and, saying a syllable to no one on the subject, wait patiently for their movements.

"A whole week!" exclaimed David, with a look of disappointment and regret; "it will then be too late—t'other thing must be done."

"Why too late, my lad?" asked both gentlemen at once; "why too late? and what other thing do you mean?"

"Why, I guesses I won't tell now; no, not till I sees first." And so saying, the boy turned on his heel and vanished, leaving his auditors greatly puzzled how to understand his singular conduct, and more than half inclined to believe his whole story a sheer fabrication.

Our heroine, who had hailed with pleasure this last measure which had so unexpectedly opened for accomplishing in the least objectionable way her purposes, and who, confidently relying on success, had waited all day with trembling solicitude for the effects which she expected the communication of her messenger would immediately produce, listened with no small degree of pain and disappointment to the account which David gave her that night, after his return, of the failure of his mission; for failure it was, as to all that regarded the main objects she had in view. Deeply did she regret that, not seeing the possibility of such a result, she had restricted the boy, whose prudence and sagacity would have otherwise prompted him to adopt her other measure in reserve, and bitterly did she now denounce that hesitation and false delicacy which had prevented her, after her visit to the cavern, from immediately taking the most efficient measures within her reach for effecting a purpose which, she more and more became convinced, her duty to herself, her lover, and to the public, alike loudly demanded at her hands. And she trembled to think, that only one more business day intervened before the dreaded Tuesday, which she began to fear was destined to seal the doom of her wretchedness.

"Go, David," she said, "go, early Monday morning, again to the village; there is now no more time for doubts or delays; go, go, seek out Mundle and Johnson; tell them all — tell them that May Martin has been in the very den of these villains, overheard their plots, seen and handled their tools for counterfeiting, even found the false dollars they had made with them, and that she will not hesitate to swear to it all; tell them this, and whatever else they require and you know, and see if that will not arouse them to action. Go, my faithful friend; every thing now depends on you. I know you will not desert me now. Go; and may Heaven speed you!"

The next day, it being Sunday, Gow visited Martin's. It was the first time May had seen him since her visit to the cavern; and she recoiled from his approach as from the touch of a viper, while she could scarcely keep her tongue from giving expression to the feelings of indignation and abhorrence with which his presence now more than ever filled her bosom. He did not long remain to add to her distress by his hated presence; for, after a few fruitless trials to reconcile her to his attentions, he petulantly gave up the attempt, and departed to join his more congenial companion in their mountain retreat, leaving his intended victim, whom he now considered already secure in his toils without further effort, to count the slow and lingering hours which must pass before she could be cheered with the consciousness that something was doing to snatch her from her impending fate. Monday at last came, but with it, to the utter discomfiture of May, came a drenching rain storm, which she knew must prevent her messenger from proceeding on her mission. Often and vainly, during this gloomy day, did she strain her anxious eye in gazing at the dark and impenetrable clouds, to catch some sign of the storm's abating. But no such appearance greeted her sight. The rain continued to pour in ceaseless torrents, till night, closing in with Egyptian darkness, cut off all hope for the efforts of that day, and sent her once more to her cheerless pillow, dejected, and fast beginning to despond of her extrication from the fate to which the current of events, in spite of her means of resisting it, appeared sweeping her on, and which the very elements themselves seemed combined to fix upon her. She did not, however, despair; she knew that if David could go to the village in the morning, and succeed in rousing them there to immediate action, they would reach the settlement in time for her rescue. At the worst, she determined either to proclaim Gow's villany before the clergyman and assembled company, if matters came to that pass, and resist the proceeding of the ceremony on the spot, or secretly elope from the house, and fly to some friendly roof for protection. After a night of inexpressible anxiety and wretchedness, she started, at the first faint dawning of the morning light, from her perturbed slumbers, hastily rose, and went to the window. To her great joy, the rain had wholly ceased, and the clouds, that yesterday enveloped the earth like a shroud of mantling blackness, having now broken away and disappeared, had given place to a clear sky and a bland atmosphere. After standing a while, to let the soft and balmy breeze fan her feverish brow, she dressed herself and went down into the yard. Knowing it would be some time before the inmates of the house would be likely to rise, and fearing that her little friend might not proceed on her mission without a fresh bidding, she slowly proceeded up the road towards his residence, which was in plain sight, about a quarter of a mile distant, with the hope that she might see him around the door, to beckon him to meet her. She had proceeded but a few rods, however, before she unexpectedly encountered him approaching.

"Where now, David?" she said; "I can hardly expect you have started out on my business so early. I was fearful you had forgotten it, and was coming to see if I could get a word with you before the folks were up."

"Forgets! that ain't David Butler; but how it rained yesterday! I ached all day to be a-going."

"But have you really started for the village? How did you get away so very early?"

"Why, I tells you how it was. Mother haunts me to know what for I goes all these times; and, last night, she promises to say nothing about it; so I tells her all. Well, then she gets into a taking, says Miss May is a poor injured orphan, and God will protect her. Then, after she goes to bed, I hears her in the night, crying again about it, and praying like. Then she gets up afore day, and says she can't sleep, so gets me some breakfast, and tells me to go right off."

"It was right, perhaps, David, that you should tell your mother, and I feel very grateful for her sympathy," said May, brushing away the tears that had started during this simple recital of the interest her wrongs had awakened in the bosom of her pious and unpretending neighbor; "but do *you* still feel willing to go and do as I last directed you?"

"I goes till I wears my feet off to my knees, to save Miss May for Mr. Ashley," was the heroic reply.

"Go, then; there may be time enough yet for all; go, my little friend, and may kind Heaven grant you success!"

CHAPTER XI.

> "They're coming! they're coming! their horses are fleet,
> And doomed are the wretches they quickly will meet."

We will now change the scene of our little story, which the events of this day were destined to bring to a fearful termination.

On a road deeply embowered in the heavy forest, about fifteen miles south of the Harwood settlement, and half that distance from the village before mentioned, a solitary horseman, in the afternoon of the day so momentous to the fortunes of our heroine, was pursuing his lonely way towards the scenes we have just left. The day was one of uncommon sultriness, even for the sultry month of August; and the traveller, occasionally plucking a fresh bough from the overhanging branches to keep off the flies that were swarming around his vexed horse, and stinging him at times to madness, seemed to look with compassion on the foamy sides of the suffering animal, and often appeared to repress the involuntary motion which he frequently made to urge him forward at a quicker pace. "It is cruel," at length said the rider, seemingly addressing his horse — "it is cruel in me to force you on at this rate, in this suffocating air, merely to gratify my selfish feelings; *you* have no loving and loved one in prospect to incite *your* steps to speed." So saying, he threw the reins loosely on the dripping mane of the horse, and, for the next mile, amused himself with watching the flies, and endeavoring, with a sort of malicious pleasure, to strike down the most determined of their band, as these little winged tormentors were settling on their wincing victim, and often goading him into a trot.

Arriving now at a point where another road from the eastward fell into the one he was travelling, Ashley — for such, as the reader has doubtless already anticipated, was our traveller, making his way to the settlement, and intending to take his mistress by an agreeable surprise, it being considerably sooner than she had reason to expect his return — Ashley, we say, at this point of intersection, was joined by another horseman. The man was considerably past the prime of life, and his hair, indeed, began to be slightly sprinkled by the frost of time, while his features, really handsome and commanding, wore something of the pensive and thoughtful cast. Bowing with respectful ease peculiar to the well-bred — a class to which, from both his dress and demeanor, he very evidently belonged — he fell in by the side of Ashley.

"Our travelling fortunes seem to unite here," said the stranger, as a languid smile played gently on his lips.

"That smile," thought Ashley, "and those features too, seem familiar to me; I must have seen them, or something like them, somewhere, though certainly I know not this man;" and he mused a while, but vainly, in trying to recall some more definite remembrance, or to account for the impression thus received. After some commonplace conversation about roads, distances, and the like, the stranger observed, —

"From some of your remarks, sir, I am led to conclude that you are a resident somewhere in the vicinity; may I ask how far you proceed in this direction?"

"I am going to Harwood settlement, as the place is called; it is my residence, now something near twelve miles distant," replied Ashley.

"Indeed!" said the stranger, with evident interest, "I too propose going to that place."

"Do you?" asked the other, throwing an inquiring glance on his companion, as if conjecturing his probable business; "a proprietor of lands in the neighborhood, I conclude, we may call you, or perhaps about to become a purchaser."

"Or perhaps a curious traveller, in search of the novel and picturesque among your wild mountains," evasively said the stranger, with a good-natured smile.

"That smile again!" said Ashley to himself; and he began to feel an undefinable interest growing in his bosom towards his new acquaintance.

"Do you know," resumed the elder traveller, after a few moments' silence — "do you know a family in your settlement by the name of Martin?"

"Intimately," replied Ashley, with a look in which some surprise, as well as inquiry, was exhibited.

"Has he much of a family?"

"Rather small I should call it, sir; he has no children of his own."

"Of his *own?* Has he those of others living with him?"

Growing more and more surprised and sensitive at the inquiries of the stranger, as they touched, at every question, nearer and nearer the great point of interest to his own feelings, Ashley, with visible emotion and some hesitation, replied, "There is a young lady living with Mr. Martin in the character of an adopted daughter; or, rather, that was the case when I left there, about five weeks since."

"Her name and age, if you will, sir?"

"They call her May, and after their family name; her age is nearly eighteen," again replied Ashley, in a somewhat constrained and half-jealous tone and manner, which the stranger seemed keenly to scrutinize.

"And this Martin removed hither from the borders of New Hampshire, where he formerly resided?"

"He did."

"The people there, then, told me correctly," said the stranger in an under tone, apparently communing with himself; "but," he continued, again raising his voice to a conversational pitch, and turning to Ashley — "but, as you appear so familiar with the girl's age, &c., you may also be able to tell me something of her character, and the standing she maintains among you."

"You would hardly ask those questions about May Martin, sir, if you had seen or heard much of her," said Ashley, somewhat resentfully. "I could easily answer them, by merely reiterating the unanimous voice of her neighbors; but, before you pursue your inquiries any further, or, at least, before you expect answers to such as you may be pleased to put on the subject, I must beg of you to tell me your motives for so doing. Miss Martin is a valued friend of mine, and is somewhat critically situated in the family in which she resides; and I know not what use may be made of the information I am thus imparting to an entire stranger. You will excuse my plainness, I trust, sir."

The other turned a full and searching look on Ashley, which was met by the latter by one of equal scrutiny and something of sternness and hauteur.

"You are right, probably, young gentleman," rejoined the elder traveller, after they had pursued their way some rods in constrained silence; "the interest we sometimes feel in a particular subject may lead us to forget the bounds which it is prudent and proper should circumscribe our intercourse with strangers; but we will drop the subject now; perhaps we may know more of each other hereafter."

Without allowing Ashley much chance to puzzle himself in trying to make out the character and objects of his companion, or to reflect on the remarks which had fallen from his lips, the latter immediately directed the discourse to indifferent subjects; and the conversation soon relapsed into its former social tone; though Ashley sometimes thought he could perceive an anxiety, on the part of the other, to draw out his information, as well as to ascertain his views and principles on the various points, which there was some appearance of his having started for the purpose.

It was nearly five o'clock, in the afternoon, before our travellers arrived at the snug little village, which, like most other villages in Vermont, imbosomed among the rough hills and clustered around a waterfall, served as the place of business and trade,—the miniature emporium, in fact, of Harwood settlement, and other parts of the surrounding country to many miles in extent. One glance sufficed to tell Ashley that something of more than ordinary occurrence was afoot among the villagers. Here stood small clubs of men engaged in low and earnest conversation,—there horses were being saddled and led out in haste, as if for some sudden expedition; while numbers were passing in and out of the tavern, one room of which, as seen through the open windows, appeared to be occupied by a dense crowd. Scarcely had Ashley reached the ground and thrown the reins of his horse to a waiter, before Shrewd David, running to his side and exclaiming in tones of joyous exultation, "O, Mr. Ashley is come!" grasped with convulsive eagerness the hand of his old friend in both of his, and burst into tears.

"Why, my little friend David! is this you here? — but crying! how is this? — what has happened? — and what is all this going on here?" rapidly asked Ashley, in surprise.

"God bless you, Ashley!" cried Mundle, now rushing out of the house, "the very man, of all others on earth, I have been praying most to see! But come with me — I have a story for your ear; and there is not much time to be lost in the telling, as you will think yourself, I presume, when you have heard it." So saying, and taking the arm of our hero, bewildered at what he saw and heard, he led him aside, with little David, wiping his eyes, and still unable to speak for his emotion, following them close at their heels.

While Ashley was thus engaged, his companion of the road had entered the rude piazza, which ran along the front of the house, and seating himself on a bench, sat apparently scanning the different faces around him, and listening to such remarks as fell within his hearing, as if willing to gather the cause of the commotion among the people, without concerning himself so far as to make any direct inquiries respecting it. He had been seated here but a moment, however, before the former rushed by him into the house, and hastily bespoke a fresh horse of the landlord, to be saddled with all possible despatch. The horse was almost instantly at the door; while Mundle, with a stout assistant, who, in the mean time, had got in readiness for a start, now rode up and called on Ashley to mount. As the latter was about springing into his saddle, his late travelling companion stepped quickly up and touched him on the arm.

"Do you leave me, sir?" said he, with some earnestness.

"I must," was the quick reply; "I have just learnt that which will urge me to the settlement much faster than you would wish to travel; but I shall see you there to-morrow. Good day, sir."

"Nay, one moment — let me but ask whom your unexpected intelligence concerns."

"Myself."

"No others?"

"One."

"The young lady, concerning whom I inquired?"

"Most deeply."

"Enough! — I attend you — landlord, my horse instantly."

"But your horse — he will hardly keep pace with our fresh ones."

"He shall at least try it, sir," said the stranger, in a determined tone, as he now received his horse from the expert waiter and sprang into the saddle.

In another moment the little cavalcade were clattering at full gallop up the road towards the settlement, followed by a wagon containing another assistant and Shrewd David, with cords and iron handcuffs, to bind and secure the prisoner or prisoners.

Before following them we will pause an instant to bring up the events of our story as they occurred at the village, before Ashley's unexpected arrival.

David, it seems, had proceeded directly to the village, on leaving May that morning. On arriving there, still at a very early hour, he immediately went to search out Mundle and Johnson, the executive and judicial functionaries of the law, to whom he applied on his previous visit to the village; but both of these gentlemen had just ridden out, and, to his great vexation, nobody could tell where they had gone, or when they would return. Without the least thought of yielding to this disappointment, the trusty little messenger awaited their coming many long hours, in an agony of impatience and anxiety. And it was not till about noon that he caught sight of them approaching. He flew to meet, and detain them on the road till they listened to his whole story.

" Well, my lad," said Mundle, after he had satisfied himself by many now readily answered inquiries, " you have told your story this time as you should do, to have us believe it; though I see you were not to blame for not doing so the other day — I have had some hints of this money digging up there, before, and suspected mischief; but good God! Johnson, would you have believed there could have been found a man in Vermont guilty of the baseness of Martin towards a girl who has all the claims of a daughter? Thank Heaven, however, there is time enough yet to stop all this, by just caging my gentleman bridegroom and his friend, before they dream of such accommodations. Come, on to our dinners — then make out a warrant, Johnson, in no time — I will be ready to take it before it is dry; and you, my boy, home with me; you deserve a dozen dinners for your faithfulness to that noble girl."

After an hour spent in waiting for, and eating, his dinner, and another or two in looking up forms and writing a warrant, the dilatory justice was about bringing his labors to a close, when in came the merchant, holding in his hand a couple of counterfeit dollars, which he said had just been passed at his store by a man from Harwood settlement, and demanded a warrant for his apprehension before he left the place. Here was an interruption that was not to be avoided; and David, who had determined not to leave the ground till he saw the sheriff on his way, and who had watched the slow progress of the justice with the most restless impatience, as he now saw them drop the business which was his only concern, and proceed to this new case, lost all control of his feelings, and fairly cried with vexation and disappointment. After a while, however, which seemed another age to the poor boy, both warrants were finished, and the sheriff despatched to arrest, in the first place, the last-discovered candidate for his greeting favors, who was still in the village. But, though Mundle performed his duty much more expeditiously than the other, it was yet nearly five in the afternoon before he had secured the prisoner, placed him in the custody of others, before the court, at the tavern, and got released from his charge, in order to proceed to the settlement, which he was just on the point of doing, when Ashley rode up to the door.

We will now follow the sheriff and his *posse*, proceeding on with furious speed, to a more interesting scene of action.

Advancing with all the speed they could urge, — being led on by Ashley, who, burning with impatience to reach the abode of his perilled mistress, before forever too late, kept several rods ahead of all the others, calling loudly and repeatedly on the rest to come on, — they had not gone half their distance before their horses, now reeking with sweat, and covered with sheets of foam, began to manifest great distress, and show evident signs of giving out, unless speedily suffered to relax.

"Hold! hold up, Ashley!" exclaimed Mundle; "this will never do; we gain nothing by it. With this speed, and in such a stifling heat as this, two miles more, and our horses drop dead under us; and yours will be the first to fail; see how he already falters." A moment's consideration convinced Ashley of the justice of the sheriff's remarks, and they all immediately relaxed into a moderate trot. It had been throughout, as before remarked, a day of unusual heat and sultriness. And now, although the sun had been for some hours obscured by a deep haze slowly gathering over it, the heat was still painfully oppressive. The atmosphere, indeed, seemed every moment to grow more sultry, thick, and suffocating. Not a leaf, even of the ever-trembling aspen, responded to a single vibration of the deadened air, while the birds sat panting, listless and mute, on the boughs, scarcely moving at the nearest approach of man. And all nature seemed sunk into one of those lethargic calms so ominous, in the warmer latitudes, of the coming tempest. Nor, in the present instance, were the more palpable indications of a thunder storm much longer wanting. Every moment darker and broader sheets of vapor rose up majestically from the west, casting a deeper and more lurid shade over the earth. And soon the low, deep peals of muttering thunder came booming on the ear, increasing each instant in loudness and frequency. The company, now beginning to be observant of the approaching shower, soon came on to the top of a high knoll, which gave them, over the tops of the intervening forest, an open and unobstructed view of the western horizon. One broad, black mass of upheaving clouds lay directly in front, extending round on either side to the north and south as far as the eye could reach; while in the centre of this fearful rack a huge column of vapor, doubling and eddying like a seething caldron, was rolling up, with the blackness and rapidity of the smoke of burning pitch.

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Mundle, glancing at the scene before him; "in fifteen minutes that terrific cloud will burst upon us in all the fury of a tornado. It is but two miles now; our horses will stand it in this freshening breeze; let us clear the woods, at least, before the tempest strikes us." And they again applied whip and spur, and put their horses upon a keen run.

CHAPTER XII.

> "At first, heard solemn o'er the verge of heaven,
> The tempest growled; but as it nearer came,
> And rolled its awful burden on the wind,
> Enlarging, deepening, mingling peal on peal
> Crushed horrible, convulsing heaven and earth."

We must now return to our long-neglected heroine, to recount the occurrences of the day at Martin's. Slowly, to her, passed the anxious day that was destined to be the last one in which she was to be known by the name of May Martin. The forenoon was chiefly occupied in making such scanty preparations as Mrs. Martin chose to direct for the reception of the company at the expected ceremony in the evening. In all these May assisted with a sort of unnatural alacrity, but with as great a degree of composure as her troubled feelings would permit her to assume. As noon approached, she expected every moment to hear the trampling of horses at the door, as the fruits of her message, which she supposed must have been delivered hours before. But noon and afternoon came, and still no tidings from the village were heard; no signs of either messenger or the success of his message were discoverable. Often and vainly did she strain her aching sight towards the woods, in the direction whence the expected succor was to appear, to catch a glimpse of approaching horsemen. One o'clock, two, and three passed, and still they came not. Perhaps they might have been led by David round in the woods to the cave, without coming into the clearing — perhaps Gow was already secured, and on his way back to the village — and the thought — this hope-grasped thought — for a while relieved her. But even this faint gleam of consolation soon vanished by the appearance of Gow himself, come to dress and prepare for the ceremony. With a hint from Mrs. Martin, that it was time she had begun to dress herself for the company, May now retired to her room, and carefully fastening the door, flung herself on her bed in an agony of grief and despair. But impelled by the painful consciousness that the crisis was at hand when she must yield to her fate, or speedily do something to avert it, and now fast relinquishing all hope in the success of the plan on which she had been relying for her extrication, she soon roused herself, and summoned all her energies for deciding what course to pursue in the fearful emergency. Could she trust herself to carry into effect one of the alternatives she had resolved on, in failure of Gow's arrest — that of denouncing him, and resisting the proceeding of the ceremony? Could she command her feelings sufficiently to do this, should she not be overawed by Martin and his wife? And even should she make the attempt, would her story gain credence, after keeping so long silent, and suffering the affair to glide along, to the very hour of consummation, without making known her situation? The more she reflected on this project, the more did her resolution waver. She had a female friend who had not long since married, and settled on the road, a few miles north of Harwood settlement, and her resolution was soon formed to attempt to escape from the house, and try to reach the residence of her friend that night. Scarce had she formed this resolution, before, casting her eye up the road, she beheld, in the distance, a man approaching on horseback, whom, from the color of his horse, she instantly recognized to be the minister, who had been engaged to officiate on the occasion. She had seen him pass the preceding Saturday on his way to a town a short distance to the north, where, at stated intervals, he preached; and she but too well knew the reason of his happening along on his return at this hour. Now, aware that not another moment was to be lost, she seized a common bonnet, and cautiously letting herself down from the window, which opened into the garden, glided through the shrubbery, swift and noiseless as the wild bird stealing to its covert, slipped through the fence, and entering a field of tall grain immediately beyond, escaped unseen towards the woods, in a northerly direction. On reaching the woods, she paused a moment to glance at the clouds, which were now beginning to heave up over the tops of the mountains, in heavy masses, accompanied at short intervals by the low, short, and scarcely perceptible rumbling of the distant thunder, affording her indubitable evidence of the approaching storm. But she hesitated not. What to her feelings were the terrors of a thunder storm to the scene she had just left, in which, but for her flight, she must soon be the principal actor? Pausing no longer than to decide how she should best shape her course to avoid all observation from the road and the open grounds on the right, and prevent becoming entangled or bewildered in the depths of the wilderness on the left, she now plunged into the woods, and keeping just within their borders, pressed on with rapid steps towards her destination. She had not proceeded far, however, before the occasional rustling of bushes and the crackling of sticks and brush, breaking under the tread at some distance on her left, apprised her of the presence of some one, apparently endeavoring to keep pace with her, for the purpose of dogging her steps. And soon catching a glimpse of his person, in a glance over her shoulder, as, with quickened steps, she pursued her way, the alarming truth at once flashed across her mind. It was the accomplice of Gow, the old man she had seen in the cavern, who was following her. Calculating to leave the valley that night, he had packed up, and having come down from his retreat, was awaiting at a convenient stand, at the skirt of the woods, in plain sight of Martin's, a signal promised by Gow, as soon as the knot was fairly tied, intending to depart secretly from the settlement, the moment this evidence of the completion of their infamous work was displayed. And it was while standing here, concealed from the view of others, in a clump of bushes, and patiently watching for the promised signal, that he caught sight of May gliding into the woods but a short distance below him. Though soon conjecturing, from the course she came, that it could be no other than their intended victim, he yet suspected not, at first, her real object; and thinking she might have come to the woods for the purpose of obtaining some favorite shrub or evergreen to deck her room for the occasion, he suffered her to proceed some way before it occurred to him that she was actually escaping from their net. Unwilling, on account of his own safety, to cause any outcry, which he was fearful she might raise, if he made any attempt to detain her by force, he determined to get ahead of her, and endeavor to frighten her back to the house. But in this he soon found himself baffled; for instead of being able to get before her, he found much difficulty, so rapid was her flight, even in overtaking and keeping her in sight. Resolving, however, not to lose the advantage of this, that he might dog her to the house where she fled for shelter for the night, and return and apprise his accomplice of the place of her refuge, he redoubled his exertions, and succeeded barely in accomplishing this part of his purpose, as far as the pursuer and pursued were permitted to proceed.

But to return to the wretched fugitive. Having been nurtured among the mountains, and accustomed, from infancy, to exercise in their invigorating breezes, her naturally active limbs had acquired an elasticity, and a capability of enduring fatigue, which are unknown to females of older countries, and which came in good stead on the present occasion. Fleeing like some frighted nymph of heathen fable before a pursuing demon, her lips parted, her hands thrust eagerly forward, and her loosened and disordered tresses streaming wildly behind her, she bounded along over log, rock, and rivulet, with a rapidity which fear only could have incited, and which the delirious energy of desperation alone could have sustained; while every glance, which at times she hastily threw back over her shoulder, at the fearful visage forever peering through the bushes, in hot pursuit, behind her, added a fresh impulse to her exertions and quickened her speed. The thunder now burst in terrific peals over her head — tall trees were uprooted and hurled to the earth by the furious blast, or, shivered in the fiercely quivering blaze of the lightning, fell in fragments around her; yet she paused not in her course. The rain poured in a deluging torrent over her drenched person, yet she heeded it not, but catching the big drops in her parched lips, as they gratefully beat over her fevered and burning brow, she fled on — on, regardless of all exposure, and forgetful of all danger but one.

Having now passed the last house of the settlement, she, just as night and cloud were fast combining to spread their dark mantle over the earth, varied her course, and struck obliquely into the road. Here, pausing an instant, in doubt whether to fly to the nearest house, or go on, in pursuance of her original determination, she indistinctly caught sight of the form of her pursuer, who had struck into the road some distance below her, and thus cut off her chance of return. Nerving herself once more for the trial, she pressed on up the road for her first destination, now about two miles distant, with no other means of distinguishing her way than what the occasional flashes of lightning afforded.

Although the rain immediately over her head had now sensibly abated, yet the deep, jarring, and continuous roar on the left, as if from the incessant pouring of a cataract, plainly told that the storm was still spending its force with unexampled fury on the mountains. And the proof of this soon became visible to our heroine, in the rapidly increasing torrents that came rushing down the steep acclivities, overflowing the road, and threatening, at every step, to put an entire stop to her progress. Arriving, at length, at the northern outlet of the valley, where the mountains shut down so close to the pond as to leave little more than space for the road to pass between them, she came abreast of one of the mountain ravines, where, at ordinary times, a small brook crossed the road. It was now swollen to a rushing river, before which no human strength could have stood an instant. To attempt to pass this, she saw, was but madness; and, as she heard the splashing footsteps of her pursuer but a short distance behind her, despair now for the first time sent its chill to her heart. But while standing on the brink of the dashing flood, which at every wave rose higher and higher, hesitating whether to commit herself to the raging element or the scarcely less dreaded power of her pursuer, a flash of lightning revealed to her sight a shelving rock jutting out from the side of the hill, a few rods back, and so aloof from the road, and screened from it by intervening boughs, as to afford her, she believed, if reached unseen, a good concealment from her indefatigable enemy, and a safe retreat from the waters, which were now rising around her with the most frightful rapidity. Making directly for the hill, and scrambling up the slanting rocks at the foot, with the expiring energy of despair, she gained the place, and dropped down exhausted on the spot, just as another flash partially revealed to her sight the form of the old man, hurrying by and rushing up to the brink of the stream she had left but an instant before. Recoiling from the view of the threatening and impassable torrent, and throwing one wild glance around him, in which horror for the supposed fate of his victim and alarm for his own safety seemed equally mingled, he hastily retreated back along the road. But before he had proceeded many rods, the gathering and pent waters above, as if suddenly bursting through their opposing barriers, in a mighty torrent, came rushing down a corresponding ravine, beyond the ridge a little distance to the south, and wholly cut off his retreat. Meanwhile, the noise on the mountain every moment grew louder and louder. The deep, distant roar, as of pouring torrents, which had for some time been heard, now became mingled with the tumultuous crashing of falling forests, the hissing, rushing sounds of disturbed and changing volumes of water, and the slow, heavy, intermitting jar of vast bodies of ponderous matter just beginning to move. Nearer and nearer it came; and now the earth trembled and shook seemingly to its lowest foundations, as, with gathering impetus, the mighty mass came rolling down the steep sides of the mountain directly towards the spot where the terror-struck girl lay concealed; and her no less affrighted pursuer, a few yards below, was wildly running to and fro, vainly looking for some chance to escape. Anon it became rapidly light, as from some steady kindling blaze above, which, growing more luminous and dazzling every instant, soon gleaming fiercely along the surface of the bubbling pond, and flashing broad and bright over the opposite mountains, lit up the whole amphitheatre of encircling hills from the darkness of midnight to the splendors of noonday.* Starting upon

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* Although it may appear singular, that a body, in which water composes so great a proportion, should emit fire enough to be visible at any distance, yet it has been established by repeated observation that a vivid and continual flashing of light is produced by the concussion of the rocks, while the avalanche is in motion.

This terrific phenomenon, the mountain avalanche, has been found to occur, it is believed, only under the following combination of circumstances: where the ascent forms an inclination of over thirty degrees, and the soil or surface rests on a substratum of clay, or a continuous body of smooth rocks, lying parallel with the outer inclination, in which the roots of the trees do not enter, or gain but a feeble her feet, May looked around her in mute consternation. Nearer and more deafening rose the tremendous din above her — roaring, crashing, grinding along, with the noise of ten thousand thunders, and with concussions that made the solid earth heave and bound beneath her feet; down, down came the avalanche with fearful velocity towards her. In another instant, the mighty mass,

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hold. The immediate cause of the avalanche is of very easy explanation. The bursting of a cloud (or, to speak more philosophically, the meeting of two deeply-charged clouds, by which an immense depth of vapor from the earth upwards is produced, and kept suspended, by the equilibrium thus formed in the opposing currents of wind, over one spot, till the mass has emptied itself) — the bursting or emptying of a cloud over the top of a mountain occurs, the loose surface becomes perfectly filled with water, under-currents down the impervious clayey or rocky bed beneath begin to be formed, and soon the whole superincumbent mass of loose stones and trees, whose roots are thus detached, starts downward, slowly at first, but soon, by the gathering impetus, with a speed and force of which the imagination can scarcely conceive.

One of the most remarkable instances of this kind ever known in the Green Mountains occurred on the eastern side of Lincoln Mountain, in Addison county, about twenty years ago. There a belt of heavy forest, nearly a mile in length and a furlong in width, was precipitated down the mountain with such amazing force as to drive the whole mass almost another mile through a slightly-inclined gorge, or valley, that shot out from the foot of the mountain. The noise and trembling of the earth, heard and felt for many miles around, on this occasion, was at the time mistaken by the startled inhabitants for an earthquake. I visited the spot in 1826, seven or eight years after the occurrence, when the long line of barren clay from the foot to the top of the mountain, looking like some broad highway cleanly cut through the heavy forest, and the impassable mass of mingled earth, rock, and trees, lying in every position — twisted off, beat up like brooms, broken and jammed together — in the gorge below, most strikingly marked the place of this tremendous exhibition of nature.

dividing on the solid ledge beneath which she stood, began to rush by her on either side in two vast, high, turbid volumes, revolving monstrous stones and hurling trees over trees in their progress, and, like some huge launch, driving with amazing force into the receding waters of the pond; while, at the same time, the forest around and above her waved, shook, toppled, and fell in an awful crash on the rocks over her head. She saw, she heard no more, but sank stunned and senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Thus let the smile or frown of Heaven
To virtue or to vice be given."

Once more, and for the last time, change we the scene of our eventful story to the place where we commenced it, at the dwelling of the heartless, despicable, but now detected and self-abased Martin. Need we attempt to describe the disappointment of the excited and enraged lover, as, bursting into the house at the head of his companions just as the tempest struck it, he made the discovery, which the inmates had made but a moment before, that his affianced was missing? — the utter discomfiture of Martin and his congenial helpmate at the unlooked-for interruption of their plans, and detection, at the very eve of consummating their baseness? — the consternation of Gow at being seized and securely ironed on the spot? — the bitter upbraidings heaped by Ashley on the heads of the guilty and shrinking pair for their treachery towards him, and their oppressive cruelty and wickedness towards the unprotected child of their adoption? — the feverish impatience with which he paced the floor, till the storm should abate, that he might fly to the neighbors, to some of whom it was supposed the poor girl had fled for refuge? — the hot haste with which he mounted his horse, the first moment the fury of the tempest would permit, and rode from house to house in the eager search?—the blank dismay and agony of heart that overwhelmed him on finding that no one had seen her, and that she was sheltered by no house in the settlement?—the prompt rallying of the startled inhabitants, the dancing of lights in every direction, as they anxiously continued the search, in house and barn, field and forest, through the gloomy hours of that dreadful night?—the consternation of the distracted lover, on coming to the frightful ruins of the avalanche, and the maddening thought that she might be buried beneath them—his hasty return and procurement of a boat to pass round the insurmountable mass, that blocked up the road—and the trembling eagerness with which he, with such assistance as chance threw in his way, sped back to renew the search with avowed determination of knowing no rest till his hopes and exertions were crowned with success, or his worst fears realized? Need we attempt to detail all this? What reader of imagination so dull that he cannot better fill up for himself a picture so difficult for pen to delineate?

It was daylight, and a beautiful and balmy morning. The scene from Martin's presented in every direction a gloomy picture of the desolating ravages of the tempest. Fields of grass and grain lay prostrate with the earth. Fences on every side had been swept away by the unexampled rise of the mountain rivulets, and their scattered materials lay strewn, at random, over the blackened herbage of every vale. Each solitary tree of the open grounds, left for shade or ornament, had been hurled to the earth, in the fury of the blast. And many a veteran hemlock and princely pine of the surrounding forests, whose giant forms had withstood the power of the elements for centuries, and whose towering tops had served from time immemorial as the familiar guides of the woodsmen starting for their homes, had been rent by the lightning or overthrown by the winds, and were no longer to be seen; while far in the blue distance at the north, a broad whitish belt marked the fearful track of the avalanche down the mountain.

Within the walls of the house was assembled a group of persons as dissimilar in character and feelings as the singular causes that brought them together. On a low bench in one corner of the room, sullen and silent, sat Gow, heavily ironed and closely guarded by one of the stout, athletic assistants of the sheriff. In another place sat Martin and his wife, with their eyes cast dejectedly on the floor, listening meekly, and with deep abasement of demeanor, to the remarks of the clergyman, who, having remained through the night, was now mildly setting before them not only the wrong of the deception which had been practised upon him, in concealing the circumstances of the projected marriage, in the advancement of which he had been so unwittingly enlisted, but the great heinousness of using such arts to compel a poor, unfriended orphan, under their protection, to violate the vows to her lover, which they themselves had sanctioned, and wed a man so abhorrent to her feelings, that she had braved, and, but too probably, met death, in trying to avoid the fate. Leaning pensively against the window stood the handsome stranger, who yesterday joined Ashley on the road, and who, though no one yet knew his business, or even name, had, through the whole night, taken a deep and active interest in the search for the lost favorite of the valley — now listening to the words of the minister, addressed to the humble dupes of the man in irons before them, and now casting wistful and uneasy glances through the window, towards the north, in which direction he, as well as all the rest of the present company, supposed the search was still going on.

Presently a distant hum, as of the mingled voices of many persons approaching with rapid steps down the road, reached the ears of the company. It came nearer and nearer; and all, except Gow and his guard, now hastily rose and went out into the yard. A band of all ages and sexes, scattered confusedly along the road, according to their different powers and disposition for speed, were flying towards the house, headed by Shrewd David, many rods in advance, exultingly shouting with all his might, "May is found! May is found! They are coming! they are coming!" And the little fellow, now reaching the anxiously expectant group at the door, and pointing to two approaching wagons in the distance, fell down in utter exhaustion, and gave vent to his overflowing emotions in a burst of tears.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the stranger, the first to find utterance in the general emotion that seemed to spread sympathetically from the boy to every person present.

"Amen — and to Him be all the praise!" responded the minister, in the deep and reverential tones of his office.

But here let us recur a moment to explain the manner of the preservation and recovery of our heroine, whom we left overwhelmed by the ruins of the avalanche.

After receiving the shock that prostrated her, senseless, to the earth, she passed, without recovering her consciousness, into a profound slumber, which immediately stole over her as her overstrained faculties ceased their exertion. Here she thus lay till the great struggle of the elements was over; when she at length slowly awoke, and endeavored to recall her scattered senses. The dreadful tumult that last assailed her conscious ear was now hushed; and all was still, save the steady rushing of the diminished waters. The stars shone out brightly, affording her a dim view of the wild scene of havoc and desolation which the fearful power of the avalanche had spread around her. The trunk of a large tree lay across the rocks directly over, and within a few feet of, her person. It was the wind and concussion of this, striking so near her head, that had overthrown and astounded her. She saw how narrowly she had escaped death, and she devoutly thanked Heaven for the preservation. A faint groan, issuing from the ruins a short distance below her, now reached her ear. It was from the poor wretch who had caused her such trials, here lying mortally wounded beneath the top of the same tree that had spared his intended victim. But before she had time to indulge in the mingled emotions which this was beginning to create, she heard voices approaching. Presently, lights appeared upon the pond, and a boat, containing several men, shot along the shore directly against the spot where she lay. It now paused in its course, and some one called loudly her name. Did she hear rightly? No, it must be an illusion; and yet, why did the tones of that voice thus thrill through every fibre of her frame? She shrieked in reply, and tried to move; but her benumbed, worn, and lacerated limbs refused to perform their office. The call was repeated — " May ! May !" It was enough, and the name of Ashley escaped, in broken utterance, from the lips of the transported maiden. The men sprang ashore, and in another moment she was clasped in the mute embrace of her lover, who, in an ecstasy of exulting happiness, bore off the living prize, leaving the less grateful task of removing the dying criminal to his companions.

The foremost of the two wagons, before mentioned as approaching, having travelled faster, and being considerably in the advance of the other, had by this time arrived within a short distance of the assembled company, now composed of nearly all the inhabitants of the settlement, awaiting its arrival in breathless silence. And now it turned into the yard. It contained Ashley and the recovered fair one. She looked worn and much paler than usual; otherwise calm, though thoughtful. Her lover lifted her from the carriage, and advancing with her at his side, he would have spoken; but his lips began to quiver, and, waving his hand, he mutely presented her to the company. The females rushed around, and by turns convulsively clasped her in their arms, or buried their faces in her bosom, with no other utterance than that which their violent sobbing, as they held her in the mute embrace, or turned away to hide their streaming tears, afforded. The men stood by and looked on with less boisterous manifestations of emotion, though the big tears were seen starting in many an eye, and coursing down many a manly cheek, as they silently gazed on the moving scene before them. While this scene was acting, the other wagon, driven by Mundle, and containing the wounded man, stretched on a bed in the bottom of the vehicle, the latter person having been brought here by his own earnest request, now slowly passed into the yard.

"Bring out a few pillows, or something to make a bolster," said the sheriff, in the tones of one accustomed to command: "this poor wretch is very evidently near his last breath, and has something to say before he leaves the world forever. Here! help to lift him out, bed and all. And bring out likewise the prisoner, Gow, that they may be confronted together."

These orders being promptly attended to, the wounded man was carefully lifted from the wagon and placed in an easy position in the open air. He first pressed his hand to his forehead, and then, opening his eyes and looking slowly around on the countenances of those standing immediately about him, said, faintly, —

"I heard them say there was a stranger here, who had inquired for May Martin, and seemed to take an interest in her fate. Is he now present?"

The gentleman thus inquired for, who had hitherto stood back, a silent though attentive spectator of all that had passed, now stepped forward.

"It is so," said the former, after letting his languid eye rest a moment on the face of the stranger, "it is even as I suspected — Mr. Harwood — Frank Harwood!"

"You call my name, sir," replied the stranger, closely scanning the pale and livid features of the man lying before him. "You call me rightly; but I do not now recollect where, or when, I may have met with you."

"Do you not remember your father's former agent for this settlement, and the adviser and assistant of your youthful errors?"

"Colvin!" exclaimed the stranger, in surprise, "Colvin!—can this be Richard Colvin?"

At the mention of that name, all the oldest settlers stepped up, and, bending over the man, looked intently in his face.

"It is," they presently exclaimed, "it is Colvin; but O, how changed!"

"You say truly," rejoined the older man, after a pause, in which he seemed to be collecting his failing energies to speak further—"you say truly of the wretched object before you—changed indeed, but less changed in person than in character. Franklin Harwood, in May Martin, the girl before you, behold your own daughter!"

"My father!" uttered May, in surprise.

"Her father!" exclaimed many voices at once.

"Her father; Frank Harwood, only son of the old proprietor, her father?" almost shrieked both Martin and his wife at the same instant.

"Can this gentleman be my father?" again timidly asked May, looking inquiringly to Ashley.

"It is the gentleman of whom I spoke, as we came along, May," replied the latter. "I thought—I half suspected something like this. And why not of so near a tie? See!" he continued with animation, waving his hand to the spectators, and pointing from the features of the father to those of the daughter—"see! did ever mirror, that mellows while it truly reflects the landscape—did ever mirror throw back the softened picture more faithfully?"

"It is even so," said Harwood, now stepping up and taking the hand of the unresisting and pleased girl. "It is even so—it can be no other than the too long neglected child of a much injured, though lawfully wedded mother, who, I trust, at this auspicious moment is looking down from her place in heaven, to forgive and bless, in the pleased witnessing of this late union of father and daughter. And if she," he continued with an affectionate smile, "if she of heaven can do this, what says my fair child of earth?"

A sweet smile broke through the starting tears of the daughter in reply.

"Let me proceed," said the wounded penitent; "I know — I feel that I have but a few moments left me; and I would improve them in undoing, as far as I can, the mischief I have done — I now grieve to say, deliberately done. You, men and owners, as you have thought yourselves, of this settlement, you more than others, in my dark career of crime, have I injured. Under pretended ownership of this valley, I gave you false and worthless titles to the lands which you now occupy, and which, till within a few months, belonged to this gentleman's father, who, having become apprised of his son's former clandestine marriage, and a living offspring somewhere in Vermont, bequeathed them all before his death, as I accidentally learnt, to this abused and persecuted girl. Would to Heaven I had remained ignorant of the fact; for it led to my second offence against you. I was not content with having once defrauded you out of the price of your farms, and with having proved treacherous to my patron, to whom I represented these lands to be so worthless, that he on this account, and owing to family troubles and growing infirmities, never afterwards inquired about them, or employed others to look them up; I was not content with this double fraud; so I had laid a second plan to rob you of all these farms at a blow, or make you pay for them again, by getting them into the possession of my associate and young pupil in crime, yon prisoner, by means of cheating the unconscious owner into a marriage with him before the will should become known here, or she apprised of her true parentage and standing, and thus inflict another irreparable injury on the worthy family of my early patron. Nor was even this enough for me: I must filch a large sum of money from a number of you, in making you pay my associate and equal sharer in all the booty gained, or to be gained by our wicked plots, for his pretended skill in helping you to discover a fancied treasure, for the effecting of which I scrupled not to expose you to the law, by burying for your finding a few counterfeit dollars of my own make. And now, having confessed all, the only atonement I can offer for my aggravated injuries is in declaring the innocence of the deluded men in possessing the false coin, and in restoring the good money taken from them — my share of which you will find in my pocket, the rest about the person of the prisoner, who, I hope, will speedily forget the lessons of wickedness I have taught him, and learn wisdom from my melancholy fate. And as to your lands, I can only recommend you to the mercy of their now rightful owner, or Mr. Harwood, her natural guardian, or," he continued, glancing at Ashley — "or him who, I suppose, is soon to be her legal protector."

"It is but right," said Ashley, stammering and confused at the evident allusion of the last speaker, and endeavoring to withdraw his arm from his fair partner, "it is but right, but honorable, that, in this strangely altered aspect of affairs, I should relinquish to Miss Harwood, as we must now call her, all claims she may have given me as May Martin."

"But supposing," replied May, still clinging to the arm of her lover, with a countenance radiant with smiles and blushes, "but supposing Miss Harwood should not choose to release Mr. Ashley from his engagement to May Martin?"

"At least, May," rejoined her lover, with a starting tear and grateful smile — "at least, May, we have a new consent to ask and obtain now."

"And it will not long be withheld," said Harwood, with a gratified look. "Your manly conduct now, Mr. Ashley, has confirmed the highly favorable prepossessions I had already conceived of your character; and even without this, I know not that I ever should have attempted to sunder those whom God has so evidently put together."

While this tender scene was enacting, most of the settlers, astonished and dismayed at the unexpected intelligence they had just heard, which had swept away their farms at a blow, had withdrawn from the spot in silence, and were standing in the background, with blank and disconcerted countenances, leaving the happy little group of father, daughter, lover, parson, sheriff, and little David — the only persons whose interests were not unfavorably affected by the development — by themselves, indulging in the joyous emotions to which the occasion gave rise, and the three last named, especially, giving vent to their feelings in pious ejaculations, hearty congratulations, and half-suppressed exclamations of unbounded delight, according to their respective characters.

Their attention was now arrested, however, by a faint groan from the old man. They turned — he had just breathed his last. The falling of some body, followed by the loud shriek of a female, within the house, now suddenly struck on their startled ears. All rushed to the open door. Martin lay weltering in his blood on the floor, with his throat cut from ear to ear, and writhing in the agonies of a death, which, in a paroxysm of remorse, shame, and desperation, his own hand had inflicted.

CONCLUSION.

Ten years had rolled away, when, one day, a meek-looking and plainly-dressed stranger, on horseback, was seen, with a hesitating air, turning into the same yard where the closing scene of our tale took place. A large, two-story building, with corresponding outhouses, now occupied the former site of Martin's dwelling. A sturdy young farmer, of perhaps twenty-five, was in the now improved and handsome yard, teaching two ruddy-faced little boys, of the probable ages of six and eight years, how to shoot with the bow and arrow.

"May I ask who at present resides here?" timidly asked the stranger.

"Judge Ashley," was the free reply.

"And these pretty boys — are they his?"

"They are, sir."

"I once knew something of the people of this valley, and I trust I shall be excused for making some inquiries concerning them. How is Mr. Ashley esteemed in the world?"

"Esteemed! — humph! — the very first man in the country!"

"And your name — may I ask it?"

"Certainly — David Butler — never ashamed to tell it in my life."

"And have you not a farm too, by this time, from your own earnings?"

"Hardly, from my *own* earnings; and yet I have a lot of the finest wild land in the settlement; and I'll tell you how queerly I got it. You know, that is, if you've heard of it, that, about ten years ago, there was a sort of upturning here, and change of owners. Well, Mrs. Ashley, that now is, God bless her noble heart! gave me this lot, outright, for services she fancies I did her at the time of this fracas. I could tell you all about it, but I suppose you have heard of the money-digging affair, and what then happened?"

"I have — what happened at the time, but not after. What became of the old occupants who then lost their farms?"

"Why, Martin, you see, being the best judge of what he deserved, like a sensible man, cut his throat on the spot; and the judge and his wife thought, considering, it would be no more than a fair shake to take his farm, after helping off his sweet widow. Two of the money diggers ran away, more scared than hurt, and their farms were also taken; and as to the rest, the judge let them off easy, paying them for their *betterments** as much as their whole farms were worth, 'twas said. Well, he could afford to do it, for all the wild lands of the valley fell to him; besides, his father-in-law, dying soon after, left him all his property — that is, about half of it, giving the rest to the charities. And now, sir, seeing you have rather a free knack of asking questions yourself, supposing I ask you one. What is your name?"

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* This word, for improvements made on lands, and frequently found on the Vermont statute book, was, we believe, coined by the legislature of that state, but whether in a legislative or literary capacity we never understood.

"Do you not recollect me?"

"Why — no — and yet seems to me I've seen your mortal phiz, somewhere."

"You once had good reason to remember me; and I wish I could say with you, that I have never been ashamed of my name. I am Gow."

"Gow! Gow! that same Gow? Who — o — o — rah! Had reason to remember you, did you say? to be sure I had. Your coming brought me that righteous lot of land, which I would be at work on to-day, if the judge would consent to let me leave him. Yes, yes, you made my fortune, if the devil did send you; but what in all nature has brought you back again?"

"Better motives, Mr. Butler, I trust, than those which once led me here. Are Mr. and Mrs. Ashley in the house? I would see them at the door for one moment."

"Halloo! halloo the house! Judge Ashley and lady, halloo!"

A middle-aged gentleman, with a political newspaper in his hand, and looking a little disturbed at being interrupted in his reading, hastily came to the door. A handsome young matron, some years younger than her husband, with a chubby, black-eyed infant in her arms, made her appearance, a little in the rear of the latter.

"What now, David? Is the house on fire, or what, that you make such an outcry?"

"Why, here is one of the seven wonders of the world! Do you know that gentleman?"

The lady shuddered, and, shrinking back a step, whispered something in her husband's ear.

"It can't be!" said the latter, a slight frown passing over his brow.

"My name is Gow," said the stranger, riding up to the door, without offering to dismount. "You are Mr. and Mrs. Ashley, I believe. She, I perceive, knows me; and well may she remember me and my former injuries. And for that reason have I presumed to call at your door. I ask not to enter, for I am unworthy; and yet, for myself, perhaps, I should be thankful that I was once directed to this spot, for the lesson here received, in the awful death of my associates in crime, and my long imprisonment that followed, was the means, I trust, of plucking me as a brand from the burning. For many years I have been an unworthy preacher of the gospel, laboring in the far west. Returning once more, and for the last time, to visit my native New England, I have come some distance out of my course to see you,—to perform a duty to you and to my own soul,—to ask that forgiveness which my God, I humbly hope, has extended to one so utterly unworthy of his mercies. Can you, sir, forgive all the injuries I intended you?"

"Freely," replied Ashley, visibly touched at the deep abasement of the other, "freely, from my heart, most freely."

"And you, dear lady, you, who have yet more to forgive?"

"If you, sir," said she, "have the forgiveness of God and my husband, it shall not long be said that you wait for the forgiveness of Mrs. Ashley for an offence committed against May Martin. You have it, sincerely."

"Dismount, sir," said the judge; "walk in and dine with us."

"Nay, it may not be, it may not be, worthy people. However we may forgive, or even respect, there may yet be associations, connected with individuals, which must render their presence forever painful. It were better that I tarried not; but ere I leave," he continued, riding up close to the door step, on which the couple now stood, and extending his hands, "I would take a hand of each, in token of peace, and as the seal of forgiveness."

His request being complied with, he lifted his tearful eyes to heaven, and ejaculated, in broken utterance,—

"O my Father above, who could forgive me, the vilest of the vile, and bless one so utterly sinful and lost, wilt thou bless and prosper these thy servants,—their little ones, and all that is theirs,—not only in the things of this life, but in that light and love which is here our only durable happiness, and hereafter our heaven?"

Casting one long and mournful look on the happy pair, and bowing a mute farewell, he slowly rode away, and was seen no more.

THE

GUARDIAN AND GHOST.

A TALE OF AVARICE AND CRIME DEFEATED.

"Slave of the dark and dirty mine!
What vanity has brought thee here?
How can we love to see thee shine
So bright, whom oft we buy so dear!"

PREFACE.

The following tale is founded on events which actually occurred, and that, too, mostly within the present century, but which a proper reluctance to invade the sanctity of family history will forbid our further particularizing. Should, however, any of the respectable descendants of one of the two strangely-contrasted brothers whom we have introduced discover — as we rather fear than hope they may — the originals of the likenesses we have attempted to sketch, we trust they will not deem the character of the one too severely drawn, or that of the other too highly flattered.

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CHAPTER I.

The summer's sun was throwing his parting beams over the circular range of high, detached hills that enclosed a small village situated near the mouth of one of the Green Mountain tributaries of the Connecticut River. Long, wavy lines of thin, blue smoke, becoming visible in the absence of the sun, lay stretched, with their delicate aerial tracery, from hill to hill above the shaded hamlet, beneath which the piteous bleat of the hungry calf, the lowing of the returning cow, the joyous shouts of children, with other various sounds of congregated life, rose loud and distinct in the growing denseness of the evening air, and mingled with the sharp, peeping cries of the nighthawk loftily careering in the expanse above, the low, sweet trill of the retiring woodbird, and the clear, hurried notes of the whippoorwill, now beginning to burst from the woody sides of the surrounding heights. The field laborers were seen, with shouldered implements, leisurely coming in from the adjoining meadows, mechanics and other men of business leaving their shops, and all quitting their various avocations for the day, and quietly taking their different ways to their respective abodes.

Among these there was one personage, a man of about fifty, on whom, as he was seen passing on horseback up a lane to his house — a large, ancient-looking building, standing aloof from all others — many an eye was turned with anxious or envious glances, for his movements more or less involved the interests of a great portion of this little community. He was the rich man of the village. But it should have been enough for those inclined to envy Jude Hosmer his wealth, and secretly repine that they could not change situations with him — it should have been enough to cure the foolish wish, in this as in a thousand instances of the kind, to have scanned for a moment but his outward appearance, to say nothing of the unknown elements of misery within — to have noted his wasted frame, his head, prematurely gray, dropped in deep study, his thin, sharp features combining in an expression of countenance, in which keen anxiety, intense, corroding thought, and eager, grasping desire, were stamped on every lineament and betrayed in every glance, the whole unrelieved by a single warming touch which spoke of sympathy, or a single relaxing smile that betokened inward happiness.

We have termed him the rich man of the village, for he had been so reputed ever since the death of his brother, who had been dead about ten years, and who was known to be his full equal in wealth. Indeed, he and that brother, Colonel James Hosmer, were the principal founders of the village, having come here nearly thirty years before, purchased the fine water privilege the stream here furnished, and the valuable tract of meadow land contiguous, built mills, engaged largely, at first, in the lumbering business, and finally in merchandise; one, as was agreed between them, keeping a store for groceries and hardware, and the other a dry goods' store. And they both, in the course of about twenty years, amassed what are considered in the country handsome fortunes. But their fortunes were made by means as different as their characters, which, excepting their common traits, enterprise and industry, were as opposite as light and darkness. Jude, the elder, the person whom we have introduced, was cold, selfish, and to the last degree grasping; while James was warm-hearted, generous, and scrupulously honest. Jude never gave any thing for any purpose, had confidence in none, trusted no one without security, and knew no mercy in the collection of his debts. James, on the contrary, was public spirited, confiding, trusted largely, and very rarely sued any body. And yet Jude, with all his parsimony, caution, and exaction, found it impossible to advance in wealth faster than his brother, who, against all the predictions of the other, scarcely ever had the confidence he reposed in individuals abused. People would make extra exertions to pay one who had used them so fairly and kindly; and failing debtors would come secretly and first secure him, leaving Old Jude, as he was called, to pounce upon the remnant of their property by legal process. In short, he prospered wonderfully, and in his noble and fortunate career strikingly exemplified the trite but golden maxim, "Honesty is the best policy."

Yes, honesty is, in truth, the best and only safe policy, even in the accumulation of wealth. Far less tact and talent are necessary to insure riches with honesty than success with knavery. And we have often wondered how our young men of business, when they cast about them among the men of millions, the Lawrences and Astors of the land, all noted for undeviating honesty, and then look at the Rathbuns, or hundreds of others, who have succeeded, perhaps, to considerable extent, without that great virtue, but who, with keener foresight and greater capabilities than the former, it may be, have failed to attain a tithe of their wealth — we have wondered how our young men could ever shut their eyes to the fact that, though trickery and unfair dealing may flourish a while, yet no great and permanent wealth can be obtained by dishonest and unfair courses — wondered how they can avoid seeing, that, if the latter class ever gain success by dishonest ingenuity and overreaching, their success, with the same capacities, would have been doubled had they pursued a course of upright integrity, which alone can long secure that general confidence indispensable to the acquisition of extensive wealth. All young men of any observation must see and acknowledge a fact so often and fully demonstrated in the business community around them. And this, we should think, would be sufficient, if no worthier motive actuated them, to induce all, however inclined, to adopt, at their outset in life, the rigid rule, that exact honesty in dealing with all classes, whatever slight advantages may for the time be lost, be always religiously maintained.

At length, Colonel Hosmer, to the sincere grief of all classes, was taken away by an acute disease, leaving a widow and an only child, a daughter of eight or nine years of age, to inherit his property. Jude Hosmer became administrator on his brother's estate, and guardian of his child, on the bonds of the widow, who in a year or two followed her husband to the grave, and thus left the whole of the property of the deceased to his unchecked control. Soon after this Jude Hosmer quitted trade, and commenced the business of usurious money-lending, buying up mortgaged securities, disputed titles, or any thing else in which he saw a prospect of doubling his outlay. His rapacity seemed to increase with his age; and he was even suspected by many of having recourse to unlawful practices to increase his wealth. Indeed, the state's attorney of the county, at one time, thought he had identified him as the secret vender of an immense amount of counterfeit money which had been saddled on the community, or found in the possession of the smaller villains arrested for attempting to pass some of it. But before the time appointed for the trial of the latter — part of whom, on promise of exemption from punishment, had agreed to turn *state's evidences*, and not only testify themselves to the allegations they had privately made against Hosmer and several of his agents still at large, but put the government in possession of other and sufficient proof — the whole gang escaped, having broken jail by means of implements furnished them evidently from without — by unknown confederates, as was said by some, while others shook their heads, but thought it prudent to keep their suspicions to themselves. Old Jude was also twice charged before the grand jury with the crime of procuring false witnesses in his lawsuits. And here, too, he strangely escaped by the absconding of some witnesses and the unexpected testimony of others. But though he thus triumphed over all who had attempted to make him amenable to the criminal law, and though for a while he bore all down before him in civil litigation, yet, at length, the general suspicion that his movements had created in the public mind began to count to his disadvantage. The current of his luck in the law turned against him; and he lost, in rapid succession, three or four important suits, in which he had been engaged, and with them large sums of money. It was known, also, that his property must have suffered deeply in several heavy speculations, into which, goaded on by his avarice, he had, gambler like, rashly entered, by way of retrieving the bad fortunes that had latterly attended him. Still he was supposed to be immensely rich in his own property, besides having the use of that of his ward. As to the latter, however, he had given out, especially since his own reverses, that his brother's property had been strangely overrated; and that, in consequence of large debts that had been unexpectedly brought against it, and the failure of securities, little or nothing, after meeting the expenses of settling the estate and defending titles, would be left for the heir over what had been expended in her maintenance and education.

Such had been the history — as far as could be known to the public of the affairs of one, who so closely kept his dark counsels to himself — such the history and ungenial character of Jude Hosmer, whom we will now accompany to his abode, which had been any thing but a blessed one — for most of his children had died early; a son, who arrived at maturity, became a drunkard, and died miserably; and his only remaining child, a married but childless daughter, had become insane. And his family at this time consisted only of his wife, a weak, sickly, querulous woman, her nurse and maid of all work, — a blear-eyed old thing, with just sense enough to make a good drudge, — a deaf, surly-looking servant boy, nearly grown, and lastly, Miss Lucy Hosmer, the niece and ward already mentioned — a lovely and high-minded girl, now in the first fresh bloom of womanhood, and standing here in singular contrast with the ill-assorted inmates of this cheerless domicile.

CHAPTER II.

As Old Jude now rode into the yard, his restless eyes at once fell on the partially disclosed forms of his niece and a young gentleman, occupying two windows opening from the parlor towards the garden, and immediately his usually severe and bitter countenance assumed an expression of unwonted asperity. Leaping from his horse, with an air of nervous irritation, he made a few rapid strides towards the barn, and began to bawl loudly and angrily to the servant boy we have named, who stood leaning over the fence, heedlessly gazing at the yarded cows.

"Shack! I say, Shack! Shack Rogers! do you hear, you deaf booby? — come here, then, and take care of this horse."

"Um? — what? — O, yes," replied the other, at length rousing up and coming forward.

"Shack," said the old man, going up closely to the other, as he handed him the bridle reins, and speaking in his ear, "do you know who that is in the parlor with Lucy?"

"Um? — what? — O — why, yes — Lot Fisher, the young lawyer — guess — an't sartin — the one that used to live with Squire Stacy, down in the street, you know."

"How long has he been here?"

" Um ? O, 'bout two hours, guess — took tea — may be three."

" Has he ever been here before, when I was away ? "

" Um ? O, yes, think likely, but not so long, guess."

" What does the fellow want here ? "

" Um ? O, — don't know — may be Lucy does," added the speaker, with a knowing wink of the off eye.

" Look here, Shadrack," said the old man, complaisantly addressing the other by his true name, instead of the usual contraction ; " I want you should tell me if that fellow comes here again in my absence. Be still about it ; but keep a little eye on their movements, and I'll do what is right — I'll pay you something extra."

" What's right, hey ? " muttered Shack to himself, as he led the horse away to the stable — " Do what is right, hey, old head — 'twould be plaguy strange if you should do any thing that's next door neighbor to right. Extra pay for keeping an eye on them, hey ? Yes, I'll keep an eye on them, old chap, without pay, but in a way you don't think of, may be."

With knitted brow, Old Jude took his way towards the kitchen, where he encountered the old housemaid, before described, shaking a fine damask tablecloth at the door. " So, Tabby, you have been getting tea for those parlor gentry, eh ? " said he, sneeringly.

" Why, la ! — why, yes, sir," replied the other, turning up her great white eyes, deprecatingly, to the angry face of her master.

" And you made a great parade, I'll warrant it ? " resumed the former, in the same tone.

" Why, goodness, now ! Why, Lucy ordered tea in the dining-room, with the reg'lar company things — be sure she did; and I didn't know you'd got objections, or I'd never done it in the born world, Mr. Hosmer," said the girl in a fluster.

Old Jude made no further remark, but after musing a moment, made his way directly for the parlor, and unceremoniously entered the room where the lovers — for such they might in truth be called — were sitting, happy in the interchange of congenial thought and feeling, and wholly unconscious of the domestic storm that was about to burst upon them.

"I didn't know that you was going to have company, this afternoon, Lucy," said the old man, in a voice tremulous with suppressed passion, as he turned abruptly on the astonished girl, without deigning a look or word to her companion.

"Nor did I myself, scarcely," she responded, with some confusion. "But if I had," she continued, with increasing firmness and spirit — "if I had known certainly that Mr. Fisher was to call this afternoon, I should have not considered it necessary, perhaps, to apprise you of the fact, uncle."

"Mr. Fisher?" said the former, tauntingly, without pretending to heed what she said, except the name of the person she mentioned — "Mr. Fisher? — who is Mr. Fisher?"

"Why, you certainly have not forgotten Mr. Fisher, uncle — the young gentleman that studied law with Squire Stacy," answered the girl, turning on the other a searching and reproachful look.

"Fisher!" pursued the old man, with a disdainful snuff — "Lot Fisher, the illegitimate boy that Stacy got from a poorhouse down south somewhere?"

"Yes, sir, the same!" promptly said the young man, elevating a head that might have served as a model for an Apollo, and turning his clear, frank, self-possessed countenance full on the other.

"O, is it," returned the former, in the same sneering tone, without looking up — "I was not aware that I ever invited you here, sir."

"Mr. Hosmer," rejoined the young man, still courting the averted gaze of the old man, "this is very hard to bear, but as it is in your own house, I will try to do it without losing temper. I am here without invitation from you, it is true, for I did not suppose you would expect me to wait for one, if I desired to come. But I wish to make no secret of my business here, sir — it was to address Miss Hosmer with the view to a future connection with me, and with the intention, if she did not discourage my suit, of consulting you early on the subject."

"Consulting! umph! really! It wouldn't require much consulting to get my mind on that matter. If Lucy can't look any where but among illegitimates and town paupers for a future connection, as you call it, I think she better not form one at all."

So saying, the old man, turning hastily on his heel, shuffled out of the room, and slammed the door after him, leaving the distressed and deeply-offended girl in tears, and her insulted companion pacing the room in silence, and struggling hard to maintain the mastery over his outraged feelings.

"Miss Hosmer," said the young man, pausing before her, after quelling his emotions in a good degree.

The girl raised her tearful eyes to the face of the other with a look full of tenderness and respect, when, with a softened and less formal tone, he resumed: —

"Lucy, when I offered you my hand at our former interview, it was done with much hesitation, and the openly-expressed fears that the circumstances, of which your uncle has so harshly taken advantage, would be made, in case you accepted me, a source of pain and mortification to you by the evil minded. The trial, as you now see, is already begun — to be repeated, I know not how often through life. And if, from this foretaste, you begin to wish it, Lucy, I will relinquish my suit from this hour, and with it, of course, all hopes of that union to which I have been looking forward with so many sweet anticipations of happiness."

"I was not looking for such an appeal from you, Lot," responded the other, again looking up with an expression of disappointment and regret. "I remember what you said at the interview, to which you allude; and I remember, also, you added, that, as for yourself, you should never be disturbed by those circumstances; for those who were worthy your esteem would never, in thought or word, disparage you on that account; and that no others would have the power to wound you. To this I assented, as a just remark, and assured you, that if *you* could thus reason and endure, *I* certainly ought not, and should not, allow such a thing to disturb *me*. Has any thing now occurred, Lot, to lead you to discredit the sincerity of my assurances, or doubt my consistency and firmness?"

"No, Lucy," replied the young man with a breast swelling with emotions of gratitude and admiration — "no, noble — noble girl; but when I saw you in tears —"

"It was not that," — quickly interposed the other, — "nothing of that kind, Lot. I indeed felt wounded — deeply wounded — insulted by my uncle; for I was insulted as much as you, by his treatment of company, whom I chose to receive, and whose respectability he knew as well as myself — ay, insulted by my uncle, my only near surviving relative, whom I so wished to love! It was a bitter thought! I could not have believed he would ever have treated his dead brother's daughter so shamefully."

"Then, dear girl, I am to feel assured, that, for aught that has now happened, I stand with you as before?"

"As well, most certainly — perhaps I should say better — your forbearance and manly conduct under such trying circumstances should raise you in my esteem, — at all events it will be highly appreciated. But I must not allow you to infer from this any final answer to your proposals. I would first have you received here as you should be. My uncle, as you must know, has great faults and peculiarities; but I would preserve his character in spite of himself, and induce him to take a course that will be for the credit and happiness of us both. In short, I would have his consent to any union I may form."

"His consent to a union with me, I fear, you will never have, Lucy," said Lot despondingly.

"We do not know that," rejoined she; "he may have other objections to you than those he has led you to infer. He is a man, I am sorry to say, whose motives are often deeply masked."

"It may be," said the former, "that I have been misrepresented to him; and when disabused, he may consent.

And if he should? — you have not yet said what you should then do, Lucy."

"Why, how dull you are!" she playfully responded. with reddening cheek.

"Ay, but the words," persisted the lover, "the comforting words, Lucy, — what should you do then?"

"Why — why, of course, I should submit to my Lot," she replied, as blushing and laughing at her inadvertent pun, she dropped her head on that fondly, proudly throbbing bosom, which, at that moment, a moment ever fearfully important to the sex, she had thus virtually chosen *for weal or for woe*, — that bosom, on which — such is woman — she must now depend for the only talisman of her earthly happiness in the allotted calm and sunshine of life — her only refuge in its never-failing storms and reverses.

The lovers, not deeming it expedient to attempt any more interviews in this house at present, agreed on a future correspondence by letter, or perhaps such occasional meetings at the house of a mutual friend in the village, as opportunity should permit; and having settled this, they were on the point of separating, when Old Jude, not satisfied with the abuse he had already offered Fisher, or irritated that he still presumed to linger, hastily reëntered the room, and began to repeat his insults in terms even more aggravating than before. But failing to elicit this time a single word of reply from the young man, he seemed to lose all his patience, and suddenly pointing to the outer entrance, exclaimed, —

"There is the way out, sir; there is the door; and while I live here, don't let me see you darken it again."

The young man deliberately took his hat, and, bowing an adieu to Miss Hosmer, departed in silence.

"Well, well," said the old man in an attempted jocular tone, as he turned to his niece with the air of one ready to apologize or conciliate. But his niece, without paying the least attention to his words or manner, brushed by him with an air of chilling dignity, and immediately quitted the room, leaving the nonplussed old man to digest his spleen and enjoy his reflections by himself.

As to Lot, he soon found his way into the street, but he scarcely knew how he had done so, for now, when he came to be alone, and relaxed the curb of self-control which he had so successfully imposed upon himself, his bosom became a perfect turmoil of conflicting emotions. Although his heart had been made to bound with happiness by the gratifying proofs he had received of the niece's love, and the noble traits of character on which he might rely for its continuance, yet that cup of happiness had been sadly dashed by the treatment of the uncle. That delicacy, which he had naturally felt before his mistress, had been rudely shocked, his pride humbled, and his whole feelings outraged; and chagrin, vexation, and resentment, in all their mingled power, took possession of his breast, for a while overmastering all the better feelings of his heart, which usually so strongly predominated there, and driving him almost to curse those who had been the instruments of an origin which now, for the first time in his life, perhaps, he was ready to pronounce a reproach.

While struggling under the influence of such feelings, as he was slowly pursuing his way, with drooping head and abstracted mien, towards the inn where he had left his horse, the hand of some one, who had overtaken him unperceived, was laid familiarly on his shoulder, with a good-natured

"Hurrah to you, Lot! Is this you, moping along with a gait so unlike your usual one? What has happened to you?"

"Squire Stacy!" exclaimed the other, starting. "You have fairly taken me by surprise."

"Ay," rejoined the former, a very plain, but well-favored, keen-eyed man of the middle age — "ay, doubtless; but that don't answer my question. You look disturbed — something is wrong with you, Lot. Where have you been?"

"Why, really, Squire Stacy," said Lot, with a half-offended, remonstrating air, "you really press me very hard about —"

"About that which is none of my business, eh?" interrupted the squire with good-natured bluntness. "True enough, I presume; but what other than a friendly motive do you suppose I have for so particular an inquiry, Lot?"

"None, none, certainly," replied the former, relaxing. "And you are right; for who is so well entitled to my confidence as a consulting friend — as you, Squire Stacy? You shall know: I have been to visit your fair favorite, Miss Lucy Hosmer."

"I suspected so, Lot. And your reception has not been such as you had hoped, I suppose."

"From Lucy herself it has been — even more; but her uncle, unexpectedly obtruding himself, insulted me beyond bearing, and, not content with that, finally turned me out of doors."

"Indeed! Do you mean to be understood literally?"

"Yes."

"Well, I should hardly thought that of Old Jude. What could be his motive in taking that foolish course to break off the match? I confess I don't now see, though I very well understand why he will oppose it. But, stay! did you lose your temper, and retort upon him?"

"No, I governed myself perfectly, though I wonder how I did."

"That is well — very well — thanks to my training — eh, Lot?"

"I confess it; otherwise I must have all but struck him."

"Ay, and defeated yourself with both uncle and niece. But one serious question to you, Lot. Why do you seek a union with Lucy Hosmer? Do you want her for herself or for her money?"

"For herself, certainly. You surprise me by the question; for I have understood she would have no property, or very little. Indeed, she once incidentally told me herself that her uncle had notified her to that effect. And were it otherwise, I had hoped you entertained such opinions of my general motives as would render that question unnecessary."

"Well, I do, Lot, as far as you are aware yourself of your leading motives in a given case; but we are all so constituted, that we do not always realize what influences most contribute to form our motives, or, rather, what our wishes would be in a case, if certain influences did not, perhaps unconsciously, operate on us. But one question more: does Lucy love you?"

"I flatter myself it is so. Indeed, I can no longer doubt it."

"Well, Lot, I am now satisfied with your motives towards that noble girl, the lovely inheritor of all her father's sterling worth. I believe, also, you are worthy of her, and I think I can promise you success."

"*You? you* promise me success?"

"Yes, I; for I think I can. This doubtless sounds strange to you; but it will appear less so when you hear certain developments, which it is now expedient, perhaps, that I should make to you."

"It may be so, but I doubt it. She will not marry me without her uncle's consent, which I have every reason to believe will be withheld. And, besides, every means will doubtless be employed to destroy me in her present good opinion, and, I fear, with eventual success."

"Poo! Lot; faint heart, eh? I see you have not so high an opinion of the girl as I have, after all. But come, let us go into my office, where we can be free from intrusion. I have, as I just intimated, some confidential disclosures to make to you."

But, before following them to the proposed conference, we will glance at the character and previous career of Stacy, together with so much of the early history of our hero as may serve to explain the nature of the connection between them, and the unpleasant circumstances attending the origin of the latter, to which allusion has already been made.

CHAPTER III.

Squire Stacy, as he was always called, who was the village lawyer, was very generally acknowledged to be a strictly honest, and, in his way, a good-hearted man. But as he was eccentric, and never did any thing like other people, his acts and motives were not always rightly appreciated, except by those who intimately knew him. He was also so shrewd in reading the characters and motives of others, and in detecting their weaknesses and faults, that he was more dreaded than loved generally by the villagers, who usually kept aloof from him, unless they desired his professional services, on which they very justly placed the utmost reliance; for many of the very traits that had prevented him from being a favorite in social life had contributed, doubtless, to success in his profession, in which he had acquired an honest fame and a fair competence. But we need not enlarge on his peculiar traits, for they will be shown sufficiently for our purpose in that characteristic act of his life which involved the fortunes of the young friend in whom we have seen him take so great an interest.

About a dozen years before the period of our story, as Stacy, one day, was returning on horseback from a neighboring town, where he had been to attend a justice's court, he stopped at a water trough by the side of the road near two or three poor-looking dwellings; and, while awaiting the slow and dallying motions of his horse in drinking, he amused himself in watching the motions of a group of boys playing near the spot, and in indulging in what, to him, was always a favorite employment — that of trying to read their individual characters, present and prospective. His eye first fell on a boy, much larger than the rest, who was unfeelingly domineering over a little timid fellow wholly unable to defend himself.

"Every thing there shows the brute and coward for life, and his actions confirm it," said the squire to himself. "Now for another."

And his eye next rested on a straight, compactly-built little fellow, standing on a flat rock, with no other clothing on him than a coarse, ragged shirt, and a still more ragged pair of trousers, with one of the legs entirely torn off as high as the knee.

"Ah! now *there* is something worth studying in that boy, ragged as the little Lazarus is," said the squire, with interest; "head, face, features, all faultless; and that expression! Why, an almost perfect model of promising indications! But let us look, now, for some exhibition of character."

And, with increasing interest, he watched the boy's countenance, which, with alternating expressions of indignation and pity, was keenly bent on the scene enacting between the hectoring big boy and his distressed little victim.

"Zeke Doty," presently exclaimed the ragged subject of the squire's observations, leaping from his stand on the rock, and advancing a step towards the bully, "can't see that any longer — can't have it."

"Hoo!" sneeringly replied the other. "Seems to me, if I was one of the town's poor, and a come-by-chance to boot, I shouldn't crow quite so loud. I will do as I please, for all you, sir."

"No, you won't!" rejoined the former. "You let that little fellow alone, and stop calling me names, or I'll fight you."

The great boy, however, only jeered the more, and was beginning to worry his victim again; when the other flew at him with such resolution, and followed up his blows with so much effect, in spite of the hard knocks he received himself, that his antagonist, though of nearly twice his size, soon yielded, and took to his heels.

"Well done!" exclaimed the squire. "Ah! I was right; all the elements of a firm and noble nature stand revealed in that single act; and intellect I know he has. If I could but have the training of that boy! And why not? I want a boy, and he may want a place. Let's talk with him a little."

"Well, my lad," said he, riding up to the boy, who was wiping the blood from his nose, "you have got pretty badly hurt, haven't you?"

"Some; but not so much as he did, I guess," coolly answered the boy.

"What is your name?"

"Lot Fisher."

"Who is your father?"

"Don't know, sir. My mother's name was Hannah Fisher; but she is dead now; and I live with Mr. Bean, who makes shoes in that house, there."

"Would you like to come and live with me, at the village?"

"Don't know but I should. What do you do when you are at home?"

"I am a lawyer."

"But they say lawyers do lie so—"

"That is a story you got from those who had lost their cases. I don't lie, and I would not have a boy that would."

"I'll go, then, if Mr. Bean will let me."

"Very well; we will go and talk with him," said the squire, riding up, and calling the shoemaker to the door.

"Well, what about this boy, sir?" he asked, as the man made his appearance. "Have you any claims to him?"

"Why, not in particular, Squire Stacy, I believe it is. The boy being one of the town's poor, I bid him off, you see, about three years agone, to keep at a quarter of a dollar a week, besides what I could get out of him; and so have kept him till this year, when the selick men said he was old enough to earn his way, and, if I didn't want him, I must get a place for him; which, seeing he didn't seem to take to my trade, I thought I should."

"That you can do, easily. I'll take him off your hands."

"What, for yourself? I don't know but I oughter tell you the boy was kinder unfortunate about his birth."

"So much the better; he will then know he must depend on himself. But can he go now?"

"Why, yes, s'pose so."

"Well, let him on with his hat and jacket, then."

"He did have a hat," said the man, "though I guess he has lost it. But where's your jacket, Lot?"

"Why, 'twan't good for nothing," replied the boy, "and when I laid it down, tother day, the hogs tore the last sleeve off."

"Never mind," said the squire; "leap up here behind me, and we'll off in a tangent for home."

Lot was accordingly mounted, in his scanty rags, without hat or coat, behind the eccentric squire, who, in this manner, proceeded on his route, entered and rode through the village, heedless of the wonder or sly looks of the villagers, and, landing the boy at his house, installed him at once in his new home.

Stacy had judged correctly of the native character of the boy, but he soon perceived that much must be done for him in the way of instruction and guidance, else the strong traits of disposition and intellect he possessed — which, under judicious management, might make him a useful and perhaps a distinguished man — would make him, very likely, if left to the guidance of chance, a curse to the community, of which he should be an ornament. The squire, therefore, in pursuance of his own notions on such matters, commenced his system of training; and his first step was to inspire the boy with self-respect, by dressing him as well as any of the boys of the village, by always treating him with respectful kindness, and by never failing to praise every good action, and only to express regret and sorrow at his misbehavior and faults. This course, with the instruction constantly accompanying it, transformed him in a very few years, from the wild, impulsive creature he was at first, into the most obedient and docile of boys. In the mean time, he was allowed the advantages of schools — the common schools till he was well grounded in the rudiments of learning, and then the classical; but of the latter only enough to whet the intellectual appetite, to teach him how to learn, to study on his own strength, and, in short, to think for himself. And such was his progress and general improvement in every thing, that, at eighteen, he was permitted to enter on a regular course of studies in the law office, at twenty-one he was admitted as a practitioner at the bar in the county, with acquisitions, both scientific and legal, far superior to many a graduate from college and law schools, when, with the advice of his master, he settled, under the most flattering auspices, in a neighboring village. Let us now return to the thread of our narrative where we left it.

"Now, Lot," said the squire, after they had taken a seat by themselves in the office, "what do you imagine to be the true cause of Old Jude's opposition to your proposed union with his niece?"

"I certainly do not know, unless, as he led me to suppose, it be the circumstances connected with my origin."

"Not by any means; he cares not two straws for that; and if the blind god had not made your eyes a little filmy when you look in that direction, I think your usual sagacity would have enabled you to see that such a cause would be wholly without effect on such a man as Old Jude, who, as regards the social relations, or any of the claimed proprieties and distinctions in society, not involving the matter of dollars and cents, has no more moral perceptions than a horse."

"True; and I confess I was surprised to be called to meet objections of that kind in him. It was, then, as I had partly anticipated, want of wealth, was it?"

"No; as closely as the old man hugs money-bags for himself, that, if I read his dark character aright, is not the true secret here."

"Why, what can be his objection, then?"

"It is because you are a lawyer."

"A lawyer!"

"Yes, a lawyer — such a one, at least, as he probably thinks you will make, and especially one who stands in the relation you do to me."

"Your words are still too much of a riddle for my comprehension."

"I presume so, and will be till you hear my story, which you shall now have: —

"Colonel Hosmer, when, in his last sickness, he found he could not recover, sent for me, who had ever been his friend and legal adviser, and earnestly requested me to accept the trust of administering on his estate after his decease, and of becoming the guardian of his daughter; his wife, he said, being too feeble in health, and otherwise unequal to the management of so large a property. I apprised him that his brother, in such a case, could, by our statute, claim those trusts; and I thought he would never consent to forego his right, and suffer a rival estate to go into other hands. He then proposed making a brief will, and me the executor. That place I also firmly declined, knowing how much Old Jude's persecutions were to be dreaded by those who crossed him where he conceived he had interests at stake. The colonel, who appeared disappointed at my refusal, then remarked, by way of explaining the reason of his request, that, though his property would probably be safe in his brother's hands, should the latter continue to be prospered, yet, should he meet with any great reverses in his own affairs, temptations might arise, to which it were better for all parties that he should not be exposed. The colonel then asked, and finally drew from me a solemn promise, that, if his brother took charge of his property, as he supposed he must, that I would keep an observant eye on the manner the trust was discharged, see that his wife and daughter were never wronged, and in all things act towards them as a friend and father. He then handed me what he assured me was an exact inventory of all his property, together with an appended schedule of all debts honestly due from him, duplicates of which, it seems, he had prepared, and kept for an emergency like the present one. With these papers, which I have kept under lock and key ever since, I left my dying friend, who, as I understood, sent immediately for Old Jude, proposed to him the same trusts he had offered me, and, in the last words he ever uttered, charged him to be kind and just to the widow and fatherless. So you see now, Lot, why I should interest myself in all that concerns the family of my lamented friend."

"I do. But have you contrived to keep up, all the while, this supervision of their affairs without the fact being known? As long as I lived with you, I never knew or suspected any thing of the kind."

"No, nor any others, I presume. Yes, I have kept it up with anxious vigilance. At the time I accepted this secret, and certainly very unusual trust, and for several years after, I had not, it is true, but little expectation of ever being called to exercise it, except in the mere offices of friendship. But it was not long before I began to have reasons to think otherwise. And my suspicions being thus early aroused, I have traced Old Jude, from that time up to the present, through all his secret and subtle windings of iniquity, not only respecting his brother's affairs, but his own, which, in the way he was managing, I thought it part of my duty to investigate."

"Do you, then, think him guilty of managing to defraud his niece and ward of a portion of her property?"

"If he claims any of the property that now passes for his, I do — not only a portion, but the whole."

"What, sir! How am I to understand you, Mr. Stacy?"

"That, if Lucy was paid off all that justly belongs to her, Old Jude would not be left with a shilling in the world!"

"You astonish me; and I can scarcely realize this of the so generally accounted rich Jude Hosmer; nor can I conceive how it can be that, with his sharpness, with his extreme economy in family expenses, and with no vices to impoverish him, he has not even gained, instead of losing property."

"True, he has sharpness in deal, even to the most unconscionable exaction, economy to pinching, and none of what you mean by vices; but, instead of the latter, he has pursued, instigated by his insatiable thirst for gain, a course of secret crimes; and it was this which, at length, proved the principal source and means of his impoverishment and losses. He began at first by bribing witnesses in his lawsuits; and his success for a while, as is often the case with those who enter on a career of crime, blinded him to the final consequences. These bribed men, under threats of exposing him, or of volunteering to those seeking new trials in important suits to do away or explain their former testimony, have continued to make fearful drafts on his purse. Besides this, the public became so generally impressed with a belief in his foul practices, that, after a while, he stood not even a fair chance of obtaining his just rights before our courts and juries; and he consequently lost several heavy suits, when he ought to have recovered. He next went into the purchase and sale of counterfeit bank bills, of which you recollect there were suspicions afloat at the time. Well, sir, the story of those prisoners whom he doubtless helped to escape was all true; and yet it embraced only one branch of his extensive operations; in which, finally, to save himself from infamy and a prison, he had to silence a combination of his accomplices and agents, who found it safer and easier to plunder him than the public, by paying them, in all, enormous sums of money. And having had quite enough of this, and become almost desperate by his losses, he lastly, in seeming exemplification of the noted adage, " Whom God *would destroy he first makes mad*," plunged into heavy speculations in the paper cities, then just got up, as a test on human gullibility, one would think, and this gave the finishing blow to his own private property."

" But is it not generally understood," asked Lot, " that his brother's estate, at the same time, has turned out badly, through unexpected indebtedness and defective titles?"

" Yes, but that story all came from Old Jude, and has been given out from time to time, during the past half dozen years, to prepare the public mind for a quiet accomplishment of his designs on the estate."

" What first led you to suspect any such designs on this estate?"

" Why, I was not quite satisfied, at the outset, that he should have taken out letters of administration and guardianship on the bonds of the widow alone, and I think the court should have required further bonds, in so large an estate; but he declining to procure other signers, the court, knowing him to be very wealthy, appointed him on the bonds he offered. I did not like the aspect of the thing, however, at the time, I remember; for it looked to me as if he was glancing at the probability of his wishing some day to appropriate a portion of this estate to himself, and was thus guarding himself against the troubles that might arise in being watched and called to account by bondsmen."

"But at the death of the widow was he not required to give new bonds, and by that time, also, to settle the estate?"

"Yes, he was notified to that effect, and here the judge of probate was clearly delinquent in duty, in not enforcing its requirements. But as he appeared so willing to give new bonds, when the subject was named to him, though he always had some plausible excuse for not doing it then, and as every one considered him so rich that it could only be necessary as a matter of form, he has been always suffered to pass on without any bond but his own. And so he has managed with regard to a settlement with the court. The great bulk of the estate was in notes and mortgaged securities, of which he never returned any inventory; and, having pretended to sell the real estate to pay debts and expenses, the amount and situation of the estate were, as he supposed, known only to himself. Well, though he was several times told by the different judges that he ought to settle, yet, as he seemed always willing, though never quite ready, he was permitted to glide along, as with his bonds, partly through the negligence of the judges, there being no one interested that could call him to an account, and partly through their fears of attempting to enforce the law on a man of his influence — for, in addition to the power incident to wealth, Old Jude was often a warm politician, when he could make any thing by it, and always contrived to exercise so much influence in the election of the judges, that they were made to feel that their term of office was, in a great measure, in his hands. Thus in regard to the management of this estate. I have sometimes thought I could see an almost literal fulfilment of the significant words of one of the old prophets respecting the approaching corruptions of the Hebrew government — *The great man uttereth his mischievous desire, and so they wrap it up.*"

"All this looks, indeed, like a forearming for the execution of some such design as you allege; but how far has he proceeded in fact?"

"So far that little remains to be done. About the time he met with the first serious reverses in his own fortune, which I have named, he commenced changing the notes and securities of his brother's estate into his own name; and I soon found, that just about in proportion as he lost his own property, he prepared the way for embezzling that of his ward. And thus, in realization of his brother's fears, he has gone on till he has destroyed, as he believes, all evidence by which any parcel or portion of that property can be identified. These acts, with many more I could name, when taken in connection with what he has latterly declared to his niece and others about the failure of the estate, afford sufficient proof not only of the intention, but the act, of embezzling the whole of his brother's extensive property, or at least turning its rightful owner off with some paltry setting out in furniture. But with all his precautions, he will be afraid of the investigation his course might have to undergo, in case his niece married one whom he could not hope to blind."

"And has he never suspected you in the part you have been secretly acting?"

"I think he has; but he is by no means aware how much I know of him. And not suspecting my motives, and the moral obligations I am under to ferret out his misdeeds, he probably thinks what I do know will only be made use of in making up a bad opinion of him. But he evidently fears me; and he has much more reason to do so than he dreams of; for, in following him in matters that really concerned me to know, I have become possessed, as I before intimated, of most, if not all, of the dangerous secrets of his dark, tortuous, and plotting career. And I tell you, Lot Fisher, that Old Jude Hosmer, as much as he is feared and courted by others, and as firmly and as strongly as he thinks he has planted himself, stands tottering on a precipice, from which I think I have the power to hurl him to destruction."

"This is as new to me as it is surprising," said Lot, thoughtfully; "but how do you propose to make use of this power?"

"To compel him to do justice to his niece. If he will do this, his crimes against the state, as the occasion has passed by, shall be kept still secret, if he offends no more. But should he refuse the condition I shall place before him, and attempt to stand out, he must then be overthrown by every means that can be brought to bear upon him. And you, Lot, must be the man, as the husband of Lucy Hosmer, to take the lead in fighting the great battle which will then ensue."

"If I was the husband of Miss Hosmer, I should probably take proper measures to secure her rights; but as I am not, and have not the least authority to act for her, how do you propose that I should avail myself of the knowledge you have imparted?"

"I would lay the whole case before her. She will keep the secret; and she will, also, have the sense to perceive, that her interest and her happiness alike require that she make you, as soon as she is of age, her legal protector, whether her uncle consent or not."

"No," said Lot, after a thoughtful pause, "I can never do that. All that I could say would be but to tell her, in effect, that she was entitled to a fortune — that I would prosecute her uncle and recover it, if she would marry me. No, never! It would carry with it an air of mercenary calculation, that I will never have associated with my name."

"I spoke as a lawyer, you have spoken as a lover. And perhaps it is well for us, in this mercenary world, that there is one passion devoid of selfishness. I am not surprised that you take this view of the subject. Still the emergency seems to require that some step to apprise Lucy of her rights should be taken soon — before she is of age, which is some time this year, I think. It would probably alter her resolution about waiting for her uncle's consent to her marriage. And besides this, there is danger that Old Jude, as soon as she can legally act for herself, will be coaxing her into a settlement, which, unless she is previously informed of her rights, he will have in his own way. Perhaps I had better see her myself."

"You should be the one, if any body; but remember I can give you no authority; nor do I wish you, when communicating with her, to connect my name, in any way, with the subject."

"Certainly not; for I can appreciate the delicacy of the circumstances under which you are placed. But if I should conclude to have a talk with Old Jude, as I may, I should directly urge his consent to her union with you, hinting enough of what I know, if I could not get along without, to bring him to a compliance. For I can see, that no strong steps can be taken to secure Lucy's estate, which is greater than you even now dream of, till your union with her. Then, if you and she wish it, I shall be ready to act, not only with all my skill as a lawyer, but with all my good will as a friend to you both."

"You know, Squire Stacy, how certainly I should retain you in any case which I could strictly call my own; and I doubt not Lucy would as certainly do the same. But, at present, I can only thank you for your kind intentions."

"Ay, Lot, but you may expect I shall be acting a little in anticipation of the only legal authority under which I can ever act; for no such authority, you are aware, could be conferred in the secret trust I accepted from Lucy's father. But whatever move I may make, it will be done with the utmost caution, and in a manner, perhaps, that you may not, at the time, comprehend; for expedients of no common character may be required to meet the doublings of my subtle opponent, who is really more to be dreaded, in a contest of this kind, than any three lawyers in the land. And here, before we part, let me enjoin the same caution and vigilance on you, not only in keeping all I have told you a profound secret, but by placing a double guard on your whole conduct. I know you have the best of all shields against the shafts of enemies and opponents of all kinds, a good moral character. But Old Jude is no ordinary opponent; and you know not what means he may resort to by way of preventing a connection in which he doubtless sees much to fear."

The conference here ended, and the parties rose to leave the place, when their attention was attracted by a slight ruffling noise, as of hastily moved paper, in the back room of the office, the door between the two rooms being sufficiently ajar to admit the sound. The squire instantly went into the room, and, drawing up the paper curtain which hung down over an open window in the rear of the building, and which had doubtless occasioned the noise, looked out, but discovered no person, though an eavesdropper, owing to a line of shrubbery that stood near the building, could have easily escaped undetected.

"I was careless in leaving that door ajar, and still more so in not shutting down that window," said the squire, as they now left the office; "but I think it could have been only some slight puff of wind that ruffled the curtain; so our secret is still with ourselves, I presume."

CHAPTER IV.

The night which followed these agitating events was not, as may be easily imagined, one of very calm repose to either of the lovers; for as they retired to their respective rooms, now many miles apart, and laid their heads on their solitary pillows, the occurrences of the day, so deeply interesting to the feelings and so important to the future destinies of both, were made to pass again and again in review before them. And while the blissful sensations, flowing from their own and the consciousness of each other's love, grew more rapturous in the retrospect, the unprovoked treatment they had received, now that the feeling of resistance, with which the bosom is apt to arm itself to meet the infliction of a wrong, had passed away, was felt with double poignancy. Lot's feelings in respect to this treatment, it is true, had been somewhat modified by Stacy's developments, which were calculated to lessen the effect of Old Jude's conduct on one of his character; but as much as these developments had quieted his feelings in some respects, they added to his uneasiness in others. He now felt himself placed in a new and somewhat embarrassing position. He knew not what fierce battles for property, and perhaps for character, in which his motives would doubtless be impugned, were about to be fought over his head. And, besides this, the beautiful girl he had wooed in the confidence arising from supposed equality in pecuniary circumstances now stood before him as a wealthy heiress; and he could not prevent new doubts and fears from arising in his mind, lest, when this should be known, his humble claims would be made to give place to more advantageous offers. The consciousness, however, of pure motives — of the fact that he had offered her his hand when he supposed her destitute of wealth, together with his faith in her character and constancy, at length in a good degree prevailed over his doubts and conquered his uneasiness in this respect. But though he might be able to quell these lover-like troubles by the deep trust which he felt he could place in Miss Hosmer, so long as she should be left to follow the dictates of her own unbiased judgment, yet doubts and fears, far less easily disposed of, now arose for the effect of the machinations which this new insight into the motives and character of her uncle assured him would be put in train to prejudice or deceive her, and break off the connection. And the more he looked forward to the probable difficulties in his path, and reviewed the slender, silken thread of love, which led to the desired consummation, and which in all cases is so easily snapped asunder, the less was his hope that it could withstand the many rude shocks that it was doubtless destined to receive.

With Lucy the case was considerably varied. She, having, by this time, no suspicions that the situation and extent of her property was any different from what her uncle had, for so many years, been artfully preparing her to believe, and, consequently, being ignorant of the deep motives he had to drive away the suitor of her choice — she could not bring herself to believe that his opposition, whether grounded on the inadequate reasons he had held out, or any other prejudice, would long be persevered in. Although, sooner than she intended, she had been brought virtually to engage herself, in her sympathy for her lover under his ill usage, and in admiration of his manly conduct on the occasion, yet she did not regret the step she had taken. Entertaining neither a doubt nor a fear that her own feelings and purposes, or those of her lover, would ever be estranged or shaken, she saw no clouds in the future. And the happiness she felt in now, for the first time, permitting her gushing affections to flow unrestrained, and in looking through the brightening vista before her, was only alloyed by the annoying sense of the wrongs and insults with which this new and interesting era of her life was associated. These, for a while, she thought she could never forget or forgive. But resentment could never long find harbor in a bosom so beautifully harmonized as that of Lucy Hosmer, who possessed the enviable faculty of making the good in every picture so prominent as to overshadow the bad, and even of extracting, like the bee, some portion of sweet from every bitter flower she found in her path. She soon resolved, therefore, to cast away anger, and endeavor to conquer her uncle by kindness. And this resolution was strengthened by the unusual cordiality with which the latter responded to her smiling salutations, when they met the next morning. But she little knew what was passing in the breast of him whom she thought thus to move from his purposes. He himself had been the first to perceive the error he had committed, and his plotting brain was already at work devising new and more effectual measures to estrange and separate the lovers, when he somehow became apprised of the existence of other dangers, which were so much more immediately threatening to his interests as to engross his whole attention, and cause him for the following week to be almost wholly absent from home.

Esquire Stacy, in the mean while, not only in fulfilment of his promise to his deceased friend, but in furtherance of the prospective rights and happiness of the lovers, in whom, now he had discovered them to be such, he took a double interest, was anxiously deliberating with himself respecting the first step to be taken in their affairs; and it was not till after the lapse of many days, so critical did he perceive the ground on which he stood to be for any active movement, that he could come to any definite conclusion on the subject. Although, however, he made up his mind first to have an interview with Old Jude, broach the subject of the proposed union of his niece with young Fisher, and then proceed as circumstances should dictate; and, with this view, he went out several times intending to accost him, but each time found, on inquiry, that he was absent from the village. Wondering what could cause the old man, who was so generally about home, to be absent so much just at this time, and growing a little impatient to put his project into execution, Stacy continued on the lookout several days longer, when, one morning, he was gratified to see the object of his thoughts making his appearance in the street. The squire immediately approached him, and, when near, began to pause in his walk, to intimate his inclination to hold some conversation. But the other, without heeding the intimation, brushed by him with a look of peculiar significance, and passed on in silence.

"Now, what can that manner towards me, and especially that expression, mean?" said Stacy, glancing after Old Jude, marching stiffly on his way. "It is the same look of malicious triumph which I have often seen him slyly assume in courts, and other places, when he had discovered some hidden advantage over an opponent; and it must now be meant for me. Ay, and if I have not read that masked face of his, for twenty years, in vain, he thinks he has made a discovery through which he anticipates a triumph over me in some matter of consequence. But what can it be?"

And he thought over his own private affairs, and even the various lawsuits of which he had the charge for others, but soon decided it could be none of these. It must be that he had got wind of his disclosures to Lot — but how? Lot himself, surely, after the cautions he had received, would not have even hinted the matter to any, except Lucy; and her, it was quite certain, Lot had not seen; and he must have known better than to have trusted such a secret in a letter to her. But by what other means could the old fox have got at the secret? "Stay, stay," at length exclaimed the squire, in alarm, as now, for the first time, the truth glanced through his mind, — "that noise we heard in the back window of the office!" He, or some dirty minion sent for the purpose, must have been there, and listening to our whole discourse, perhaps. Well, it does seem as if the Old Evil One himself told him what was going on, else how should he have the thought of being there, with such an object?"

The secret of the old man's continued absence during the past week was now explained. Although Stacy, in the disclosures he made to Lot, had not, while stating what he could prove of Hosmer's misdeeds, named any of the persons on whom he relied for evidence, yet he knew the old man would use every effort to discover them, and that, if successful, he would scruple at no means to corrupt or intimidate them. No longer doubting that his subtle opponent, in his alarm at what he had probably overheard, had been abroad solely for the purpose of trying to ascertain the sources of his danger, the squire at once resolved to lose no time in visiting the most important of his secret witnesses, in order to ascertain whether any of them had been discovered, or suspected to be such, and to take such measures with them, by inducing them to commit themselves on paper, or otherwise, as should be best calculated to secure them against the tampering arts to which they might now be subjected. Accordingly, the next morning, he saddled his horse, and set forth on his projected expedition, with some apprehensions, certainly, but, after all, with no serious expectation that any thing of consequence had been discovered, much less that any thing could have been effected. But he soon began to perceive traces of his opponent; and, as he continued his rounds, he became fully satisfied that, wherever he went, the crafty and persevering Old Jude had been there before him, making use of all the means that wealth, artifice, or intimidation could effect in repairing the breaches which, with the clews he had received, he had, to his great alarm, doubtless, found open and unguarded in the wall of defences with which he supposed he had so strongly intrenched himself. One man, by whom Stacy expected to show a bold fraud in the sale of real estate, in which that person, in a pretended public sale, had been employed to bid in

— as he did, for a mere song, and then redeed to Old Jude — the most valuable piece of Colonel Hosmer's property, now produced a receipt from the administrator to apply for the amount of the value of the premises, except interest, and pretended that what he had before said respecting the sale was only to gratify a momentary spleen, and not intended to be in earnest. Another person, by whom was to be proved a collusion in the compromise of what is usually termed a trumped-up claim, brought against the estate, in which Old Jude, on the payment of some small sum, and taking receipts for the amount claimed, had charged the estate several thousand dollars, had now, like the other man, his false answer, feigning to have forgotten all about the affair, except that it was, as the papers showed, a fair and honest transaction. And nearly thus did the vexed and chagrined squire find every case which related to the frauds he once could have proved, he felt sure, to have been committed on the estate. Nor was he any more successful with those by whom he had, directly or indirectly, been intrusted, in confidence, with secrets respecting the old man's criminal offences, by which it was supposed he could be sent to the State's Prison. One had just bought a piece of land of Hosmer, on trust, and now knew nothing to his disadvantage. Another had, suddenly, the past week, gone off for some unknown part of the western country, having, somehow, been helped to the pecuniary means of doing so, as he had long wished, but never before had the ability; while another boldly denied a communication formerly made to Stacy, in private, and challenged him to prove it.

"Outwitted and outdone! ay, completely outdone, at least for the present," exclaimed the baffled lawyer, as he now relinquished the further prosecution of his object in despair, and rode thoughtfully homeward. "But we will see if there be no other field of action in which to give battle to the slippery old rascal. If human ingenuity can devise the means of bringing him to justice, it shall now be done with a vengeance; for now that he has seen so much of my hand in this strange game, he will never rest on the defensive, even as regards me personally, but soon be hatching his plots to destroy me. So he or I must fall in the contest, which I can no longer avoid, if I would."

One morning, several days subsequent to Stacy's signal failure in respect to that power which he thought he possessed over Old Jude, and in which he so much trusted to bring the other to terms, as the former was sitting in an open window of his office, deeply engrossed in the subject that now principally occupied his thoughts, he suddenly started, and called to his wife, who was out training some shrubbery in the pleasant little yard enclosed between the house and office, —

"Wife, how old is Lucy Hosmer? Do you know exactly?"

"Yes," replied the comely and intelligent-looking matron, turning round with a surprised and inquiring expression — "yes, I know; and, by reckoning a little, I can tell to a day."

"Well, reckon away, then. I want to know exactly."

"I will, Mr. Impatience. How long have we been married? — eighteen years, is it not?"

"Yes, this June."

"Very right, sir; but what day of June is it now?"

"To-day is the twentieth."

"Well, Lucy was of age—that is, eighteen—then, yesterday."

"Are you sure of that, wife?"

"Yes, and will make you so in a dozen words. You will remember that you depended on having Colonel Hosmer, your great friend, at our wedding; and do you not also remember that he was prevented from attending by the confinement of his wife, that day, of their first and only child?"

"I do—yes, I do recall the circumstance now; but what day of the month was that?"

"The nineteenth, as you will find by consulting our Bible record."

"You are right, woman, though I did not dream that she was of age so soon. It is strange," he continued, slapping together the book in his hands with an air of vexation, "it is plaguy strange I can't keep up with any thing. This must be seen to immediately."

"What must be seen to, my dear sir? I do not see to what all this can tend."

"I didn't mean you should, Mrs. Curiosity; (there, that makes us even.) It is an office secret, which women must not know."

"Well, I was not aware that office secrets embraced so particularly the ages of the ladies. But, to be serious if your inquiry relates to any move you are about to make respecting Lucy's property, I hope you will go on, for I have long suspected that great wrong would be done that amiable girl."

"Ay, but don't guess it aloud; and, look here, wife—if Lucy comes into the street to-day, I want you should ask her into the house; if not, contrive up some way to get her from home where I can see her; for I must not let that sun go down without having a talk with her."

But all Stacy's inducement to see his fair young friend was destined to be destroyed by the unexpected occurrence of the next moment. Even before he and his wife had finished all that would probably have been said, they were interrupted by the appearance of Old Jude's servant, Shack Rogers, who entered the office, holding a paper in his hand, which he presented, saying in his usual gruff and unconcerned manner, —

"Mr. Hosmer wants you should read that, squire, and tell him whether or no it is good in law."

With considerable surprise at so unexpected a request, Stacy took the paper, and that surprise soon changed to a feeling bordering on consternation, as he read it as follows: —

"In consideration of three hundred dollars, received to my full satisfaction of Jude Hosmer, in his note payable in clothing or furniture, I hereby fully acquit, release, and discharge the said Hosmer from all claims, rights, and demands of every kind I have or may have on him for any and all the property, personal and real, that came into his hands as my guardian, or as the administrator of my father's estate;" which instrument, bearing date of that day, was signed by Lucy Hosmer, sealed and witnessed by Shadrack Rogers and Tabitha Talbot, all in due form.

When the squire, on a second perusal, became fairly convinced that this strongly-written instrument was genuine, he could scarcely restrain his indignation from bursting forth in open execrations; for he saw at once that the settlement and discharge into which the injured orphan had been so artfully drawn, by the wretch who should have protected instead of plundering her, must give a finishing blow to her expectations, unless it could be proved — which was not very probable — that the paper was obtained by fraudulent representations; and he saw also very clearly that it had been sent there, not for the purpose of advice, as the old man, who had not consulted him for a dozen years, now pretended, but in the spirit of insulting defiance, and only to show the completion of his triumph. And if ever the conscientious attorney was tempted to do a wrong act, it was to tear the paper to pieces on the spot. But a second thought corrected the inclination, and he said to himself in a low tone, —

"No, no — that won't do, nor perhaps any thing else; but I cannot, and will not, believe that Providence will permit such a monstrous wrong to go unpunished."

As the squire finished the sentence, he happened to glance at Shack's countenance, and found it, to his surprise, beaming with an expression of pleasure and intelligence. And the long, scrutinizing look, which he instantly turned on the other, convinced the penetrating lawyer that the fellow possessed feelings and intellect that he never had credit for; and that, though he was formerly very deaf, in consequence of a severe scarlatina, his deafness now, for some shrewd motive, must be partially or wholly assumed. This circumstance, which scarcely would have been noticed by an ordinary observer, or, if noticed, passed over as of no consequence, was eagerly seized on by Stacy as a new clew to possible advantages of much importance, and he at once determined to follow it up by putting Shack to further trial. With this object in view, he raised his voice, and said, —

"Yes, the paper is good enough."

"Umph — what?" said Shack, through habit or design.

"Tell your master it is good in law," bawled the squire; "but," he added, letting his voice fall to a very low key — "but shall you tell him also what I said to myself about his cheating Lucy?"

Shack again looked knowingly, and, without making any direct reply to the question, observed, —

"One of my ears, somehow, has got a notion of hearing, when any thing is going on against Lucy, who has treated me kinder than all the rest put together there; but it won't hear any more, squire, if you tell what I sorter mistrust you have guessed about it."

"I will keep your secret till you tell mine," said the squire, regarding the fellow with increasing interest.

"It is safe, then," said Shack; "and if you feel as I do about certain things, perhaps I may tell you what you don't know, and help on matters some."

"Ah, that is it, my good fellow!" exclaimed Stacy eagerly and with brightening eye; "that is what I want — we understand each other, do we? Lucy — her property — and the one she would like to marry — eh?"

"Exactly; but I must go now, or some bird will be carrying news to the old man."

"Stay! are you not hoeing corn, these days, down in his meadow, by the river there?"

"Yes, and it is out of sight of the house where the old chap stays, mostly."

"Well, suppose I should stroll along down there with my fish-pole this afternoon, could you show me where I might catch a few good trouts for a breakfast?"

"Yes, oceans of 'em — I saw a whacker there yesterday," replied Shack, with a significant wink, as he hurried out of the office.

CHAPTER V.

Leaving the persevering squire, still undiscouraged by his repeated defeats, to devise, by the expected disclosures and assistance of his freshly-discovered ally, new schemes on the ruins of the old, for the accomplishment of his object, which, however hopeless the case might seem to one less fertile in expedients, he had no notion of yet relinquishing, we will now return to the abode of his opponent, through whom most of the remainder of our story will be, perhaps, the best developed.

After Old Jude had succeeded in consummating his baseness towards his niece, in the settlement we have described, and sent off Shack to carry the evidence of his iniquitous triumph to Stacy, he, being then left alone in his room, sat some minutes immersed in deep thought; when arousing himself, with the air of one who has run through some calculation and found every thing satisfactory, he began to soliloquize: —

"Yes, as far as I can see, every bar is now put up, and all is safe at last, which makes my property as good as in my best days — perhaps a little better. Well, I wouldn't have been so frightened for any small sum! But I have headed the meddling rascal cleverly, blast him! and I want he should know it, which will be both a caution and a punishment to him, till I can safely punish him more effectually. I wonder what he will say, when he reads the paper — I should like just to get a peep at his face, at the time, to see him wince under the bitter pill." And the old man chuckled aloud with inward exultation at the thought of having outdone one of the shrewdest lawyers in the country, and thus secured to himself a fortune. "Well, he and his young prig of a lawyer won't be quite so fierce to get the girl now, I guess, seeing they can't get the property, in which they were to go snacks, I suppose. But if the hateful young dog should persevere, he must be stopped — 'twon't do to let him marry her — he may be digging up something. No, Lucy must be cured, but in some different way from the one I tried — though if I could have provoked him to strike me. But stay, I forgot to watch Shack! — no knowing who can be tampered with — perhaps it ain't too late to see to it now," he added, jumping up and passing out at a back door to the top of a sharp little hill near the house, embowered with fruit-trees, where, unseen himself, he could obtain a view of the road even to Stacy's office door — being the post of observation, which he had used a fortnight before in dogging Lot and Stacy to the office, when, in his jealousy and meanness, he stole round to the rear of the building, and played the eavesdropper, as already intimated.

"Ah! there, Shack is just entering the office," he resumed, peering through the shrubbery — "I will allow him five minutes to do the business in and be out."

So saying, the suspicious old man took out his watch, and noted the minute hand till the allotted time had expired; when, looking up and seeing nothing of Shack, he became uneasy, and his cold gray eye began to gleam with distrustful glances. In less than another moment, however, the servant emerged from the office door, and struck out directly for home.

"All right — even if he had tried to tamper, he couldn't have made the stupid booby understand any thing in so short a time," said Old Jude, with relaxing countenance, as he put up his watch, and retraced his steps back to his room, where Shack in a short time made his appearance, and, with his usual air of careless indifference, delivered the paper, with which he had been despatched, to its owner.

"What did he say, Shack?" eagerly asked the latter.

"Um? — what?"

"What did he say, I ask you, when he read the paper?"

"Um? — O, not much; but what was in it, that made him look so queerish about it?"

"No matter — what did he say and do?"

"Um? — what? — O, he said 'twas good enough in law, he s'posed, then had something over to himself, and acted kinder maddish."

"Then it made him mad, did it, Shack?"

"Um? — what? — O, yes — grumbled, and made faces, like."

"Ha! ha! ha! he! he! he! Good!" again chuckled the old man, in his dry, hyena-like laughter. "There, Shack, you may go back now to your hoeing in the meadow."

For the remainder of the day Old Jude gave himself almost wholly up to the enjoyment of his fancied triumph. The scheme had employed all his powers of cunning and contrivance for years; and he now, for a while, felt a pleasure and exultation, not only in proportion to the magnitude of the object, but to the anxious study, the constant fears, and especially the recent alarms, he had experienced, in accomplishing it. But the human mind has been so constituted by a just and wise Providence, that it can never long receive happiness from the success, or from any of the fruits, of fraud and injustice. The excitement of the chase, the employment of the faculties in devising, and the energies in executing, a scheme of iniquity, may, indeed, for the time, stifle the voice of conscience; and the final achievement of the object may, at first, bring a sort of savage pleasure to the bosom. But when those faculties and energies cease their exertion, when the attendant excitement dies, and the short-lived pleasure of the triumph passes away, the mind reacts, the conservative principle we have named begins its office, and soon brings the heart to long and painful repentance, or plants within its core the thorn of enduring remorse.

And so it was with this execrable wretch, in the execution of his flagitious plot for robbing his orphan niece of her inheritance. As the excited feeling attendant on the pursuit of his object, and the almost fiendish glee he had felt in its accomplishment, subsided, other and unwelcome thoughts began to obtrude themselves on his mind. He could not, with all the sophistry with which, villain-like, he essayed to appease the annoying suggestions of awakening conscience — he could not help seeing that his was not, in fact, a triumph over a hated opponent, but over an innocent, defenceless girl. He could not prevent the promise he made to his dying brother, to be just to the fatherless, from recurring again and again to his remembrance, which seemed strangely to grow more vivid in this particular, the more he attempted to deaden it. And he went to his lone bed that night with thoughts and feelings which he tried in vain, and which he cursed himself for not having the power, to banish from his disturbed mind — with thoughts and feelings, in short, which none but the guilty can know.

Some time in the night he was suddenly awakened by a strange noise, — he could hardly tell what, though it seemed to him like a human groan, coming from beneath, or some place not greatly distant, as far as he could attach any definite idea to it, in his confusion. But it chimed in so well with a troublous dream, which he now recalled as having just disturbed him, that he soon concluded the supposed noise must have been part of it; and, uttering a peevish psha! he tried to compose himself again to sleep. And in this he had nearly succeeded, when the same hollow groan, issuing from below, and seemingly struggling upward, as if through the opening of a rending tomb, rose distinctly on his startled ears, and died away, moaningly uttering, as he thought, "My brother, O my brother, why hast thou disturbed me?"

The confused and frightened old man sprang bolt upright in his bed, and, with glaring eyes, peered over on to the floor, and round the dimly-seen corners of his room; but he could discover nothing. He then, with palpitations so wild and audible as almost to disturb his own hearing, sat some moments listening intently for a repetition of the dreaded but expected sound. He was unable, however, to distinguish even the slightest noise. All within and around was as silent as the grave. Still, not satisfied to let the mystery rest here, he arose and groped his way out of his room, and round into that of his servant, who slept in the next adjoining apartment.

But Shack was snoring loudly, and evidently had not been disturbed. The old man then came out into the long hall that ran by their rooms, and again listened for some movement in other parts of the house. He would have felt almost thankful to have heard the stealthy steps of thieves, of whom he usually stood in much fear, for it would have relieved him of an awe and dread far more terrible. But he could not hear any thing; and he soon returned to his bed, and, after an hour's turning and tumbling, varied only by fitful starts and turns of intense listening, was lucky enough to fall asleep.

The next morning Old Jude arose with a perplexed and troubled brow, and made anxious inquiries of all the members of the family whether they had heard any unusual noises during the night. Uniformly answering him in the negative, they, in their turn, became curious to know why he had made such inquiries; and it was easy to see that, although he evaded their questions, or turned them off with some false account, his conduct and appearance had not a little excited and disturbed them. But they were left to indulge in such conjectures as they chose to make, for he studiously avoided any further conversation on the subject.

"It couldn't have been any thing but a dream, after all — psha, what a fool to be so disturbed!" muttered the old man to himself, with an effort to shake off the impression, as he seated himself at his writing desk, and began the business he had allotted for the day.

But notwithstanding these efforts to deceive himself and quiet his disturbed feelings, he was far from being at ease through the day; and at night, as the family retired, he was observed to go round, and carefully lock, or bar up inside, the doors and all possible avenues of ingress to the house. For the three succeeding nights, the old man neither heard nor saw any thing to disturb him. By this time he had so far succeeded in making himself believe that he had been the dupe of his imagination, sleeping or waking, as to enable him to divest himself mostly of his fears of a repetition of the strange occurrence. And, as he rose on the fourth morning following the mysterious event, after hooting at himself a while for his folly in ever having bestowed a serious thought on the subject, he resolved to go on as if nothing had happened with that part of his grand scheme which, now that the property was secured against any ordinary event, only remained to be completed, that of causing his niece to discard the young lawyer, for whom, he doubted not, she still cherished an affection that, if not destroyed, would result in their union. Having previously meditated attempting secretly to undermine Lot's character, as a method of accomplishing this object, he went out, after breakfast, for a walk to some of the public resorts of the place, where he might meet with some of that despicable class who are the curse of country villages — the retailers of slander, into whose ears he could whisper his insinuations with a certain prospect that they would soon grow into stories sufficiently damning to subserve his purposes, or where, perhaps, he would meet with opportunities of effecting his purpose by other and more direct means. And he had been out but a short time, before he unexpectedly met with an occurrence out of which, with his usual cunning, he soon contrived a plot that was singularly well calculated to favor, if not wholly effect, the general object he had in view. He encountered in the road a poorly-clad, vagrant young woman, who asked his charity to buy food and clothing for herself and the small child she carried in her arms. At first the old man turned away with his habitual snuff of contempt at such objects; but, musing a moment, he turned round and asked her a few rapid questions, by which he gathered that she was from an adjoining town, had been deserted by a suitor on the eve of a promised marriage, and was now an outcast, with the fruits of her imprudence on her hands — a male child, now nearly a year old.

" Well, woman," said Old Jude, after listening attentively to her various replies, " if you will let me name your boy, and then do as I say, I will give you something."

" My child has already been named," replied the woman.

" Ah ? well, you may call him by it after you leave this place; but while you are here, if you will call him Lot Fisher in the hearing of all you speak with, and give no explanations, I will give you a dollar."

" I don't see what good that can do you, sir; but, as it won't hurt the child — "

" No, not in the least; so here is your dollar. But don't forget the name — *Lot Fisher* — nor the condition. There, you may go now. Stay! do you see that house yonder ? " added the speaker, pointing to his own house. " Well, call there, and you will find a young lady who is partial to that name, they say, and she will give you something, I presume."

The woman, after balancing the coin in her hand a moment in evident hesitation, finally put it up and moved on in the direction indicated by Old Jude, who kept his eye on her, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her enter his house.

CHAPTER VI.

After sauntering about the village till noon, here and there dropping insinuations calculated to confirm the story which he expected the woman would be the means of raising to the disparagement of the young lawyer, the old man returned to his house, and entered with an air of apparent indifference and abstraction, while secretly he was trembling with the most eager curiosity to hear something to apprise him of the result of his infernal contrivance; nor did he have to wait long in suspense. Tabby, hearing the footsteps of her master on the floor, the next moment, came hurrying from the pantry, flourishing a plate in one hand and a spoon in the other, in her fluster, and broke forth, —

"Don't you think — O, don't you think, Mr. Hosmer, what a flare-up we have had here, to be sure!"

"Why, what has happened — what has happened, Tabby?" asked the old man, in affected surprise and alarm.

"Why, a woman with a young 'un come in, and asked Lucy for money to buy things for her little Lot, she said. But Lucy didn't seem to hear her call it Lot, for she went out and brought and gin the cretur a whole half dollar! (fore I'd done that!) and asked, in a kind of pitying way, how she come to be so needy. The woman answered she'd been misfortunit. Lucy then told her she hoped she'd make good use of the money, and asked her what her child's name was; and the woman blabbed it right out afore us both — Lot Fisher! Lor! how beat Lucy did look, to be sure! But she soon kinder plucked up, and asked the woman why she called it by that name. Well, the cretur hung her head a little, and said she had got good reasons for it. Jist at that minit I looked up, and Lucy was as white as a cloth, and enymost quite fainted away. So I made a spring for the camphor bottle, but trod on the dog's tail, who up and bit this little finger I done up here to the bone. Well, I yelled, and fainted too, I do s'pose, clean away; for whin I come to, Lucy had got over it enough to get to her room; and the pesky woman and all had cleared out, leaving me," she added dolefully, "like some dead lady, laid out for the cold grave."

"That all?" said the old man contemptuously. "Poo! what a fuss! and all kicked up by finding out what every body but Lucy and you knew before about the fellow you made such a parade for, a week or two ago, here at tea."

"Yes, only think! But if I'd knowed it then — fore I'd touch to do a thing!" replied the beauty, shaking her head, with clinched teeth, and a look that was meant to carry out the sentence more forcibly than any words she could find for expressing it.

"Well, but about Lucy," resumed the former; "it hasn't made her sick, has it?"

"No, s'pose not; but —"

"But what? Have you been up to see her since?"

"O, yes, a few minits ago, to tell her dinner was 'bout ready, and kinder talk it over a little; but she was in a taking still, and said she shouldn't want any dinner. Fore

I'd cry to be obleeged to give up such a fellow!" she added, as she left the room to resume her work.

"It has pretty much done the business, I guess," muttered Old Jude to himself, with a lip curling with inward exultation; "and the stories which she will now soon hear, to confirm the impression that has evidently been made, will give the finishing blow."

And the old man was not mistaken. While the heart-stricken Lucy was striving to hope, against conviction, that the inference the woman's words and conduct had compelled her to draw did not apply to her lover, the village gossips one after another dropped in, full of mysterious hints concerning a certain discovery they had just made, which they would not, at first, for the world tell Mr. Hosmer's family, but which they finally did tell, with many regrets that Miss Lucy did not feel well enough to appear, that they might console her in her grief and disappointment. These communications all, in some shape or other, making established facts of what was before a matter of inference, continued to be repeated to Lucy, by the officious Tabby, till the former supposed there could no longer be a doubt about the former disgraceful conduct of her lover; and, though ready to sink with grief and mortification, she soon was enabled to summon the stern resolution to tear his image from her heart, and have no further communication with him forever.

O ye who tamper with the loves of united hearts, especially those of the softer sex, who, with keener sensibilities to cause suffering, are more helplessly your victims, the terms brute and fiend are appellations too mild for your deserts! Your offences may not, indeed, be punishable under any human code; but so long as your acts implant wounds in the heart, to which the blows of the steel dagger were a mercy, your doom in another world will be that of the assassin and murderer!

"I now stand on firm ground, at last," said Old Jude to himself, as he retired to bed that night, under the full persuasion that, by his last cruel and contemptible trick, he had brought his whole plan of operations to a successful close, and might now bid defiance to every threatened danger. But the memorable saying of the apostolic philosopher, "He that thinketh he standeth let him take heed lest he fall," is generally no less applicable to our temporal than spiritual condition. The old man's guiding maxim had always been, *Steer clear of the law, and seize every advantage.* When, therefore, he had shielded himself against its meshes, as his cunning and experience had generally enabled him to do, it never seemed to have entered into his calculations that any other power or circumstance could affect him. And the occurrence, consequently, by which he had been so startled a few nights before, and by the less questionable repetition of which he was destined now again to be humbled, and soon to be overthrown, found him wholly unprepared and helpless, it being something against which his system of tactics had made no provision.

About midnight the same unearthly groan, which he had heard before, struck on his slumbering senses, and instantly aroused him to consciousness.

"Just as I feared — that voice again!" hurriedly mumbled the old man, in troubled accents, as he sprang up in bed, and, with a beating heart, awaited the expected repetition. The sound, however, was not repeated; but, instead of it, a tall figure, in white, seemingly rising slowly through the floor, and standing in frightful outline before him, greeted his appalled vision, and rooted him, speechless and spell-bound, to the spot. After remaining stationary a moment, looking down upon him, as the guilty old man conceived, with a look of mingled sorrow and indignation, the figure raised one of its shrouded arms and silently and solemnly pointed upwards; then, slowly receding, it passed through the open door and disappeared.

Old Jude had not been much of a believer in ghosts, and, but for his guilty conscience, he would not, probably, have lost his self-possession. And, even as it was, when he saw the apparently tangible object retreating through the door, a gleam of hope shot through his mind that it might be a personage of flesh and blood; and the relieving thought so far restored his prostrate spirit and strength that he soon found voice to cry for help.

"Shack! Shack! Shack!" he screamed, with desperate energy.

But he was answered only by the echo of his own husky voice. No response came from the room of the sleeping servant. The old man then mustered courage enough to scramble off the bed and run round to Shack's room; when, finding the latter snoring loudly, he seized him by the shoulder and shook him rudely, while, with chattering teeth, he exclaimed,—

"Shack! Shack! did you hear it? did you see it, Shack?"

"Um? What?—wha—wha—what is it?"

"The shape—that is, I mean the man, or something that has been in my room, and has just gone out?"

"Um? Was there one? My gorry! I wish I had a club. But I ain't afraid; we'll go down and light a candle, and then I'll help you catch him."

So saying, Shack hastily slipped on his pantaloons, and, followed by the old man, hurried down stairs and struck a light; when they both went over the whole house, but found every door and window fastened, while no indications of housebreakers were any where discoverable, within or without. Long before this was accomplished, the alarmed females were dressed and out to ascertain what was the matter. Old Jude tried hard to allay their fears, and quiet the tumult he had occasioned, by attributing the cause of his disturbance — if, in fact, he was not wholly mistaken in supposing he heard or saw something — to the jumping of a rat or the cat; but his restless and excited manner wholly belied his assertions, and only increased their apprehensions. He, however, was quite willing to have a light kept burning in his own and each of their rooms during the remainder of the night, and that Shack should walk the halls as a watch. The next morning, the old man charged the family to keep secret every thing which had happened. But notwithstanding all his precautions, the whole village had the story before night, that the house was haunted, and Old Jude had seen a ghost, and strange and various were the comments that were made on the occasion.

During that day the old man struggled hard, but in vain, to banish this strange and more strangely repeated visitation from his mind. Sometimes he would almost convince himself, that it was some person whose design was either to rob or to frighten him. But the question which he could not answer, constantly arose — How did he get into the house? If robbery was the object, why did he not effect it, and steal off in silence, instead of making a noise and showing himself? And what object could any one have in merely frightening him, without making known any wish or demand? Thus he was met in every attempt to solve the mystery on natural principles; which his conscience failing not to remind him, that each of these visitations followed a heinous wrong towards his niece, — the first the finishing act of his fraud on her property, and the last his attempt on her happiness, — his guilty conscience whispered, "Thou knowest," and completed his confusion. And yet he determined to yield not to its promptings.

"Folly!" he would exclaim, "to think a man who has been dead ten years can come up to upbraid the living! A ghost! what is a ghost? The mere thing of the imagination, which cannot be seen by the natural eye. But this I did see with my natural eyes; and it must be something real — something tangible; and whether I can tell how it came there or not, it must be something that I can exclude from my room, and I will do it!"

Taking courage from this view of the subject, he began to contrive how he could best secure his room against the further intrusion of the dreaded apparition. And, with this object in view, he went up to his garret, and overhauled a parcel of old hardware and cutlery, left on hand when he quitted trade. Here he found a door lock of unusual size and strength; and he instantly resolved to fit it to the door of his sleeping-room. Accordingly, selecting corresponding screws and staples, and providing himself with suitable tools, he proceeded to his room, and went to work.

"There!" said he, with a sort of gleeful but forced bravado, as he completed the adjustment of the massive implement, and brought the rusty bolt to play in its place — "there, let me turn this key, thus, on the inside here, when I go to bed, and I will defy the devil himself to get in!"

But although Old Jude had in this manner succeeded in fortifying his feelings, in some measure, against the contingencies of the night, yet it was not without many fears and forebodings that he retired to his chamber. He would gladly have had Shack, or some other one, sleep in his room; but his fears that the ghost, or whatever it was that had appeared to him, might communicate his guilty secret, were so strong as to overcome his desire to be attended; and he therefore resolved to trust to his precautions, and once more nerve himself to brave the result alone. Accordingly, after turning the key of his ponderous lock, and carefully examining the fastenings of the windows, and inspecting every part of his room, even under his bed, he trimmed his lamp to burn through night, and went to bed, when, favored by his exhaustion and loss of sleep the previous night, his troubled spirit was soon wrapped in forgetfulness.

CHAPTER VII.

The last strokes of the house clock, telling the solemn hour of midnight, awoke the old man from his uneasy slumbers. The lamp had gone out, and all was dark and silent. In a moment, however, the same prolonged, sepulchral groan, that heralded the apparition of the preceding night, resounded through the room; and the next instant, the same fearful figure was dimly seen standing in the middle of the floor, looking grimly down on its affrighted victim.

"Obdurate mortal!" it at length said, in low, deep accents, "thinkest thou to elude the spirit thy misdeeds have called up, by guarding thyself with bolts and doors? Twice hast thou disregarded my coming—now I am permitted to speak to thee, and utter my last warning. Know, then, guilty wretch, that yet forty days are allowed thee to cause the wrong to be righted—the stricken heart to be restored to happiness. Heed the condition of mercy, else I then come again to take thee hence!"

The apparition then gradually fell back towards the door, the grating bolt flew back, the door opened, and the figure vanished in the entrance, leaving the old man sitting mute on the bed, with his eyes starting from their sockets, his hair bristling up on his head, and his hands desperately clutching the bedclothes, in the overpowering fear that had seized him; nor did the disappearance of the dreadful object this time bring the accustomed relief. His spirit, at the thought of what he had seen and heard, died within him, his strength was gone, and for some time all power of utterance was denied him. After a while, however, feeble and distressed cries began to break from his lips, and he shrieked out the names of his servant and the other members of the family by turns. But all slept too soundly, or were too far distant to hear him. And the poor wretch was compelled to remain alone, sprawling helplessly on his bed, and moaning in his fear and distress, or crying in vain for help, till the long and eagerly desired morning light appeared, and ended his night of horrors.

Shack was the first one to discover the situation of his master. As the former rose, and came out from his bed-room, his attention was arrested by the sounds of moans and deep sighs, coming from the apartment of the latter; and he at once turned in that direction, and perceiving the door standing open, concluded he would go in to see what was the matter. But he stopped short at the very entrance, in surprise and alarm, at the spectacle that there met his eyes. The old man sat crouching on the bed, amidst the deranged and twisted bedclothes, with a cold sweat standing in drops on his haggard face, and with a countenance exhibiting the very picture of misery and despair. His grizzled hair, during the night, had changed to milky whiteness, his strained eyeballs were bloodshot, his cheeks sunken, and his whole appearance, indeed, so altered, that his servant in any other place would have scarcely recognized him.

"O Shack!" exclaimed the old man, piteously.

"What is the matter, Mr. Hosmer? what has happened?" asked the other, in evident concern, as he approached the bedside.

The old man made no reply, but attempted to adjust the bedclothes around him.

"Master is sick," resumed Shack, after awaiting a moment for an answer.

"Shan't I call the folks up, and then go for the doctor?"

"No, no," said the old man, feebly, resuming his wonted caution, and making an effort to arouse himself, "no, don't do it, nor ask any questions, nor say any thing to any body about what you have seen. I have had a bad night, but shall be better soon. Help me on with my clothes, that I may get out of this accursed room."

Shack then assisted him to dress, supported him down stairs, and placed him in an arm-chair, in the common sitting-room, where the family soon assembled around him, with manifestations of wonder and alarm at his strangely altered appearance. He, however, carefully concealed from them the true cause of his condition, and pretending to attribute all to a sudden fit of illness, of which he was now better, sunk into his usual reserve. But common observation taught them, that something extraordinary had happened to him, and his appearance through the day, during which he continued feeble, nervous and dejected, confirmed their opinion, and convinced all who saw him, that, in some mysterious way, the old man had received a shock, both in body and mind, from which he would not speedily recover. And they were right in their conjectures — from that night Old Jude Hosmer was an altered man. The impossibility that his door could have been unlocked by any one from the outside, and the equal impossibility, he conceived, after his close examination of his room, that aught of flesh and blood could have got there in any other way, had, from the first sight of the apparition, destroyed all his hopes that his nocturnal visitant might be an earthly one; and yielding to the dreadful thought which, in spite of the warnings of conscience, he had twice rejected, that his monitor was the shade of an injured brother from the grave, he listened to the supernatural message as to a doom that was neither to be questioned nor avoided.

"All that a man hath will he give for his life." Old Jude Hosmer, as well he might be, was always afraid to die; and as he had gone on increasing in years and crimes, the fear of death had been sinking deeper and deeper in his heart. From the first of his three fearful warnings, Conscience, as before intimated, had secretly interpreted the *Mene Tekel* of the mystery to mean the relinquishment of his ill-gotten possessions to the rightful owner; but he had tried hard to blind himself to the interpretation, and struggled fearfully to avoid the sacrifice. Now, however, when he had at last been smitten and humbled to the dust, in view of the dreadful alternative which was placed before him, and which he was made to feel there was no way of escaping, every motive and feeling, even the great ruling passion of his life, gave way before this controlling terror; and, goaded by his fears rather than any sincere penitence, he now, although he neither received nor looked for any further visitations at present from his supernatural monitor, he now, every day and hour, grew more and more anxious to fulfil the condition which alone could relieve him from his agonizing apprehensions of the menaced doom.

As soon, therefore, as his strength and the shattered condition of his nerves would permit, which was not until several days had elapsed, he commenced in earnest the work of unravelling the web of iniquity which had cost him so much time and plotting to weave. And, as the first step, he sought out his niece when alone, and gave up to her the acquittance he had obtained from her in the manner before described, merely telling her he had discovered an error in his reckoning much in her favor, which, as he had concluded to make a new arrangement of his affairs, would now soon be adjusted to her satisfaction.

With this deceptive announcement — for he could not be frank, even in good work — he left her, greatly surprised, as well as puzzled to comprehend the true reason (the alleged one not being fully credited by her) of the unexpected act, though she could not help believing it in some way connected with the late mysterious occurrences which had so much disturbed him. Having effected this first, and, as he conceived, the most important step, in *righting* the *wronged one*, without any exposure of his former wickedness, which he seemed nearly as anxious as ever to conceal, his mind became a little more tranquil; for the papers having always been carefully kept in his own hands, he could now complete the restoration of the embezzled property, by transfers and conveyances, very easily and with all the secrecy he desired. But though he could thus easily restore the *wronged* one to her rights of property, yet there was another part of the requirement — that of restoring her to the happiness he had destroyed — which he had more difficulty in deciding how to perform. He believed that Lucy would hold no communications with her lover, even if she was requested, so long as she was under her present impressions; and he could think of no way of removing those impressions from her mind without confessing, or at least betraying, his own agency in causing them. This he could not bring himself to do. And in the dilemma, he soon resolved that, without consulting her at all on the subject, he would himself write directly to Fisher such a letter as would naturally bring him to the house, trusting that, when the lovers were brought together, explanations would follow, and a reconciliation soon be effected. Accordingly, he wrote a respectful note to the young man, apologizing for his late treatment, which arose, he falsely affirmed, wholly out of a misapprehension of the character of the other, who, now that all objection was removed, was at full liberty to resume his visits. Having thus written, Old Jude secretly despatched the letter to its destination, and awaited the result with as much trembling solicitude as he ever did the event of a lawsuit in which he had thousands at stake.

Lot, in the mean while, totally ignorant of all that had occurred at Hosmer's, began to grow very uneasy at the failure of his accustomed letters from Lucy, from whom he had not received a syllable for nearly a fortnight; and he was meditating a trip to the village of her residence, to ascertain, if possible, whether any thing had there happened to cause the delinquency, when, one morning, the newspaper carrier, who had returned from that section late the evening before, handed him a double-sealed letter. Not remembering the handwriting, and supposing it some message on professional matters, he threw it by, to be taken up in the order of business. In the course of the forenoon, however, it came up; when, carelessly breaking the seals, he read and reread, with feelings of mingled astonishment and doubtfully-admitted delight the unexpected contents. In twenty minutes his fleet-footed pony stood saddled and pawing at his door, while the master was seen within hastily plying his brushes on coat, hat, and boots, which, it seemed to him in his impatience, were never before so reluctant of polish. Within three hours more he dismounted his reeking horse at the office door of his old friend and patron.

"Do you own that horse, Lot?" asked Stacy, poking his sarcastic phiz from the window.

"Yes — how do you do?"

"Well — but if the beast is your own, who, in your village, lies at the point of death, whom it is supposed one of our doctors can save?"

"Do be serious, squire," said Lot, now entering the office. "I have called to consult you before going somewhere else. There," he added, taking out and handing the other Old Jude's letter, "read that, and tell me whether it is genuine; and if so, what has produced the unexpected change."

"Genuine enough," answered Stacy, after musing over the letter a few moments. "It is his, clearly; and I rather guess, under the circumstances, he is acting in earnest and without trick, this time."

"Why, what hold have you got of him?" asked Lot, eagerly; "done any thing by way of legal proceedings?"

"Nothing," replied the other, "nothing at all, since I saw you. I have been worsted by the old fox, who doubtless overheard our conversation from the back window there; completely worsted at every point; and, to crown all, he has settled off with Lucy, already of age, I find, and coaxed her to give him a strong and absolute discharge, on his giving her his note for the paltry sum of two or three hundred dollars; and even that payable in cats and dogs. Old Jude all over!"

"Outrageous! but has he contented himself with doing that? Lucy has discontinued her letters to me wholly, and without explanation; and yet I receive this letter from him inviting me to resume my visits! What can it all mean?"

"I won't decide now; but something unusual has certainly happened over there. It is reported in town that the old man has been haunted by a ghost. Some say — among whom is our good old deacon, who has visited him — that he has been converted, or is about to be; others have it, that he has had fits; and all agree that he is feeble, and has grown old, in appearance, ten years within the last week."

"This sounds very strangely; what is your version?"

"I have none to give you; I am waiting myself to see what it will result in. But there is probably a relenting in the old man towards you, Lot; and I would go and improve the advantage he has given you to the utmost, lest it prove, as I fear, a temporary one."

CHAPTER VIII.

That afternoon Old Jude, who had contrived to have his niece take a seat with him in the parlor, sat for hours at the window, anxiously gazing down the road, as if on the watch for some expected visitor. At length his countenance brightened. A person, who was evidently the object of his solicitude, was seen approaching; when, after watching him till he turned in towards the house, the old man, without apprising his companion of the fact, rose, and quietly stole out of the room. The next moment Lucy looked up, and Lot Fisher stood on the threshold before her. Surprise and embarrassment kept her mute till the other spoke.

"I hardly know whether I was expected by *you*, Miss Hosmer, to-day, or not," he said, with some hesitation.

"You were not, sir," she replied, with reserve.

"It may be right, then, to show you my warrant for appearing before you," he rejoined, approaching, and handing her Old Jude's letter.

With a tremulous hand she took the letter, and, though she evidently read its contents with the deepest surprise, yet she merely remarked, —

"This, as regards my uncle, is certainly sufficient; and I will go and apprise him, sir, that you have called."

"Miss Hosmer!"

"Sir!"

"Both the discontinuance of your letters and your present manner make it evident that you have heard something to affect the position which I supposed I occupied in your esteem. In mercy and in justice to me, will you not tell me what it is?"

The same delicacy which had before prevented Miss Hosmer from communicating to her lover the reasons that had decided her to drop her correspondence and reject him still strongly revolted against the solicited explanation. But her sense of justice, under his renewed and earnest entreaties, at length prevailed; and she reluctantly related all the essential circumstances connected with the vagrant woman's call at the house, as they took place, simply adding that no one could be at loss in drawing the inference which so obviously followed.

Lot was thunderstruck at a disclosure so strange and unexpected; but, soon rallying from his surprise, he asked if it was known where the woman could then be found; and, being answered in the negative, he, with an air of disappointment, resumed,—

"O, why could you not have communicated this to me immediately, that I might have had the chance, which is probably now lost, of refuting the insinuation from the woman's own lips?"

"Perhaps I ought to have done so, as a matter of form," replied she, greatly embarrassed; "perhaps I should have done so, or have concluded my construction a wrong one, and let the affair pass unnoticed, had not my impression been confirmed by the same story, or those of a similar character, coming from several other sources."

"If Miss Hosmer's confidence in my character was so small as to permit her to condemn me, unheard, on such evidence," rejoined Lot, with an air of deep mortification not unmingled with offended pride, "I know not that it would now avail me, if I felt myself called to the humiliating task to trace out the slanders which this worthless vagrant, or others, may have disseminated concerning me. I had hoped I had a standing in her opinion not so easily to be shaken. As it is, it only remains for me to bid her farewell."

Before the confused and now relenting girl could find words to delay her impetuous lover, or qualify the sentence he had so hastily assumed against himself, he had bowed and was gone. Feeling herself justly obnoxious to her lover's charge of precipitancy in condemning him unheard, and half convinced of his innocence, though he had scarcely affirmed it, she rose in great agitation, and went to the window. With sensations which it would be difficult to analyze, she saw him hurriedly mount his horse at the gate, and depart without one backward glance towards her. Her riveted eyes followed him, as, avoiding the village, he rode with desperate speed towards home, till his receding form was lost to view; when she turned, and murmuring, with a sigh, "O, why could he have not said he was innocent!" burst into tears, and hurried to her apartment.

Old Jude, who had witnessed Lot's hasty departure — from which he argued that no reconciliation could have taken place — watched anxiously, but in vain, during the remainder of the evening, for Lucy's appearance, that he might question her respecting the result of the interview. And, after a night made restless by his growing anxieties on the subject, he seized the first opportunity, the next morning, for a private conversation with her. Female pride, by this time, had come to the perplexed and wretched girl's aid; and it was with feelings bordering on resentment towards her lover, for not longer persevering in clearing himself and reconciling her, that she replied to her uncle's inquiries. And this wayward mood, partly felt, but more assumed to conceal the deep and troubled feelings of her heart, caused her so to color her representations, and to make the case so hopeless of reconciliation on her part, that the old man became greatly alarmed for the eventual result. Indeed, he actually shed childish tears of vexation and disappointment, and accused her of perverseness. Disturbed and astonished beyond measure at her uncle's conduct, which had all along appeared to her very extraordinary, and which had now become wholly inexplicable, Lucy, in her turn, was aroused to expostulation at his inconsistency, while she defended herself by intimating the stories she had heard. The old man admitted the existence of such rumors, and falsely attributed his former opposition to his belief in them, but asserted that he now knew them to be without foundation. Growing more and more excited and earnest, the maiden bent a searching look on the other, and demanded of him whether he knew the origin of those stories, and by what means he had discovered them to be false, at the same time declaring that she would not marry a prince whose character stood under such imputations. The other made several attempts to evade those questions; but she constantly brought him back to the point, and persisted with so much determination that the conversation was at length brought to a dead stand. Conscious that he had gone too far to recede without arousing her suspicions, and perceiving he could not even stop where he was and gain any credit for his assertions, the humbled old man, impelled by his fears and anxieties for the event, reluctantly admitted himself to have been the cause of all the trouble, though not without much prevarication and concealment of the motives which had actuated him.

For the first time, the mind of the disabused girl began to catch glimpses of the secret history of the old man's heart in all the recent transactions in which her different interests had been involved; and her grieved soul revolted at the dark picture she there saw delineated. That part of it only, however, which lay nearest her heart called forth the exclamation, —

"O uncle, uncle, what wretchedness you have made me! what injustice you have caused me to do towards another!"

The conversation which now ensued was brief and mutually embarrassing. But where all parties are equally anxious to bring about an object, their purposes are soon accomplished. In the course of the forenoon, Shack, mounted on Old Jude's fleetest horse, rode up to the door, and taking a letter from the hand of his respected young mistress, bore it off rapidly towards its destination.

Lot, who in the mean time had condemned himself for the manner in which he had terminated his last interview, which, if prolonged, he felt might have resulted more auspiciously, and who now, on the receipt of Miss Hosmer's letter, was overjoyed to learn that her mind was completely disabused — Lot, we say, was not slow to respond to the frank invitation she had conveyed him to renew their intimacy; and another day brought him to her side.

So great was Old Jude's delight to see the man whom, one month before, he had driven from his house with insults and scorn, now again there, and there, too, successfully prosecuting the very object he had taken so much pains to defeat, that it would have been difficult, perhaps, to decide whether he or the reunited lovers were the most gratified party on the occasion. But the old man had construed the supernatural behest to extend, not only to the undoing of the mischief he had done in separating the lovers, but to the perfecting of their union, which, to avail him in purchasing his immunity from the threatened doom, he felt he must see accomplished within the allotted time of his probation. It was no wonder, therefore, that, while that awful warning was constantly sounding in his ears, and while the days of that fearful probation were rapidly rolling away, he was filled with anxiety to have the happy event consummated with the least possible delay. And no sooner had the long and happy interview been brought to a close, and Lot seen to depart, than the disquieted old man again sought out his niece alone, and eagerly asked her if they had fixed on a day for the wedding; and being told they had not, nor even agitated the question of the time, he appeared much disappointed, and earnestly proposed to the wondering girl that the union should be consummated immediately, or within a week or two at the farthest; and having drawn from her the day on which she expected Lot to repeat his visit, he expressed great solicitude that the time should then be appointed, and that, too, on as early a day as would be consistent with the ordinary arrangements of such occasions. But Lucy's delicacy shrunk at the thought of such indecent haste, and such a business-like manner of disposing of her even to the man of her choice; and, knowing nothing of the secret motives that urged her uncle, whose conduct in the affair grew more and more inscrutable to her mind, she inwardly resolved she would not consent to so immediate a union, and least of all would she be the first to hint the matter in the future meetings which were expected to occur.

Another interview between the lovers soon came and passed off as the former one; and again was the now almost persecuted girl instantly beset and importuned by her uncle to tell him what had been done in compliance with his wishes. When he was informed of the fruitless result, he absolutely groaned with anguish, and seemed so distressed at the disappointment, that the other, touched and disturbed at his obvious concern, and beginning to suspect he must have something of moment depending on the event, at length promised she would not resist any proposal on the subject which should come from her lover.

Lot's visits now became frequent; and cordially meeting the advances which he perceived Old Jude timidly attempting to make towards him, he soon, and with a delighted heart, learnt the wishes of the former for an immediate union, which he himself through delicacy had forborne to urge. The ardent lover, as will readily be imagined, was not backward to act on the hint thus unexpectedly received; and he united his entreaties with those of his new-found coadjutor with such effect, that the fair girl was compelled to yield, and agree, as with blushful hesitation she at last did, to the great relief of the old man, on a day for the nuptial ceremony—the very day, as it ominously happened, which closed the mysterious period within which the wronged were to be righted, or the wrong-doer called to meet his doom.

It was a new thing to the wondering inhabitants of the village to witness, at this hitherto dull and unsocial mansion, the lively bustle of preparation that now ensued — the liberal outlays that were made for dresses and ornaments to be worn on the coming occasion, and for luxuries for the entertainment of company — the repairs and garnishing of rooms that took place, and the purchasing of costly articles to take the place of the former meagre and niggardly furnishing of the house — in all which the different inmates, with animated movements and smiling faces, were seen to engage, and none with more alacrity and obviously gratified feeling than the lately cold and churlish but now transformed master and still accounted owner of the establishment. We must linger no longer, however, to give a detailed description of all that was said and done in anticipation of the happy event, but hasten on to the catastrophe of our story, which was now close at hand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE eventful day at length arrived. The numerous guests, comprising nearly the whole adult population of the place, assembled to witness the ceremony, which was to dispose of their fair and almost worshipped neighbor to one, who, in spite of all the disadvantages attending his origin, had gained, by his rare qualities of head and heart, a scarcely less enviable place in their esteem. Old Jude, who had awaited the day with a feverish anxiety and impatience, which was nearly alike unaccountable to the family and all others cognizant of his late singular conduct, now seemed to hail the hour of consummation with almost puerile delight; though it was observed, and afterwards remembered, that as he moved restlessly round among the company, with his enfeebled gait, and thin, pale, and ghastly features peering from the snow-white locks, which hung trembling over them, he was frequently lost in deep fits of abstraction, from which he would arouse himself with a forced glee, and that a sort of unnatural excitement marked his appearance in all his conversation and movements on the occasion. At the appointed hour, the bride and bridegroom made their appearance; when, amidst the blessings and kind wishes of all, the lovely orphan was united with her handsome and gifted lover. The ceremony and the congratulations that immediately followed were scarcely over, before Old Jude came forward and presented

Lot with a thick, heavy package of papers, consisting, as he averred, and as in truth it afterwards appeared, of deeds, transferred notes, and other legal evidences of all the property to which Lucy was entitled, accompanied with a written statement acknowledging that it took all he possessed to make good her fortune, and throwing himself wholly on the generosity of the young couple for the future support of himself and family. Lot courteously received the package, and without examining it, carelessly placed it on the sill of the open window beside which he was sitting; while the old man, fetching a deep sigh, as if some fearful load was removed from his mind, took a seat by the side of his niece, and appeared more tranquil and happy than he had done for many weeks before — a circumstance which the former noticed with heartfelt pleasure, and drew from it an augury of what she so ardently desired, that her uncle was indeed about to settle down a better and happier man. But all her pleasing anticipations and kindly wishes were destined to be repaid the next hour only with disappointment and aggravated sorrow. As the gratified guests, after partaking the sumptuous entertainment with which they had been regaled, and spending a short time in innocent hilarity, were beginning to depart, Old Jude went out into the yard to look to his servant, who was engaged in bringing up to the door, as fast as they wanted, the horses and carriages of the company. Shack, who had thus far performed his duties with great alacrity and cheerfulness, now, as his master appeared in the yard and began to order him about, suddenly became so dilatory, sullen, and perverse as to exhaust the old man's patience, and cause him at last to break out, as was his former wont, in abusive epithets, which the other seemed in no humor to bear; for he retorted with great boldness, plainly intimating that he was a slave no longer. Astonished at such words and bearing from one who was an indented servant, and who had ever before borne his petulance and abusive language submissively, the enraged master turned fiercely upon him, and exclaimed, —

"Impudent scoundrel, begone! from this moment, you quit my house and employment forever!"

"It's a bargain!" cried Shack, bluntly, and with dogged composure, while he looked round on the company, now mostly drawn to the door by the collision, as if appealing to them to witness the compact — "it's a bargain — exactly what I wanted — so now, old man, we are quits in law as well as friendship. But before I go, jest for the fun of the thing, I'll whisper a word in your ear."

He then walked deliberately up to the other, and, as he had proposed, whispered something in his ear; when he sprang back, and, with a look of malicious triumph, awaited the effect of his secret communication.

And that effect was soon visible. The old man, after standing mute an instant with a staggered and perplexed expression, suddenly started, like one on whose mind some exciting truth has unexpectedly broken, and a look of overpowering chagrin settled on his countenance, but was quickly succeeded by one of unmitigated wrath and maddening concern. Hurling with fury his cane at the head of the devoted Shack, he turned eagerly towards the window on which the package he had given Lot was still lying.

"The papers — the papers!" he gasped, rushing forward towards the object of his concern, with one hand extended out for the grasp.

But just as his half-clutched fingers were fastening on the desperately coveted prize, he suddenly stopped short, a change passed over his countenance, — his arm sunk nerveless by his side, and straightening back and glaring horridly around him, he pitched forward to the earth, with the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils. The violence of his emotions had ruptured a blood-vessel, and the next moment the spirit of Old Jude Hosmer had winged its flight to its doubtful destination in another world.

We must task the imagination of the reader to picture the scene which followed among the family and guests on the awful dispensation that had thus turned their festivities into mourning — the painful sensations of the young couple, when all that could be known and inferred, respecting the situation of the property and its connection with the old gentleman's death, was discovered — the great stir made by the event on the community around — the wild stories that naturally arose out of it among the ignorant and superstitious, and the baffled attempts of the intelligent to account for a great part of what had happened. For, after all the circumstances attending Old Jude's strange conduct before and at the time of his death were known, much still remained enveloped in mystery, which none could penetrate. Shack, who had been seen to whisper to the deceased the secret communication which produced such instant effect on him, was often asked what he had communicated on that occasion, and whether he could throw any light on the subject, but always in vain. He would either doggedly refuse all explanation, or turn off the subject with some odd evasion. And thus the whole affair, after having been, for some months, the talk of the country around as one of the greatest wonders of the day, at length passed into a legend of the marvellous and supernatural, whose foundation in fact none were ever found to gainsay. Lot, now that the fear of the old man's power was removed by his death, was soon furnished with all the evidence which would have been required to substantiate his wife's claim to all the property, had such been needed. But it was not. The deeds and other instruments made out and left by the deceased were found to convey legally the whole estate, which now, by common consent, after a liberal provision was made for the widow and her insane married daughter before named, passed into the hands of the young couple — the business and all transactions connected with it at length resumed their wonted channel, although the public at large soon had reason to rejoice in the change of the ownership and possession of a property, by the management of which so many interests were affected.

CONCLUSION.

It was something like seven years after the concluding incidents of our story, that Shadrack Rogers, who had been retained in the employment of Lot Fisher and his wife, and who had been so generously rewarded by them for his good conduct, as to enable him to buy a farm for himself, announced his intention of emigrating to the far west. And on the morning of his departure, after he had bid adieu to his still almost idolized young mistress, and slung his knapsack for the start, he sought her husband, who was writing in his library.

"Well, Squire Fisher," he said, in his usual independent manner, as he entered the room, "now for the few words you said you wanted with me in private, before I started; for you see I am all equipped for *over the hills and far away*."

"Ay, ay — but be seated, Shadrack; for, as I said, I wish for a little talk with you," said Fisher; "and in the first place, let me ask what you propose to do out west."

"Get rich, and then be judge, or something," replied Shack very gravely. "Perhaps, if they keep you in Congress long enough — say twenty years — and I guess they will by the strong way they have just given you your first election — perhaps I'll meet you there."

"On my word, Shack, I don't think you will ever have to regret not having set your mark high enough," responded Fisher, laughing heartily. "But after all, if you go on picking up information and improving as fast as you have since living with me, you may yet be found in public life. I have no doubt you have native capacities enough for almost any thing — Squire Stacy has often said you were one of the shrewdest chaps he ever knew."

"The squire and I are tolerable friends," said Shack, composedly.

"Yes," rejoined the other, "and that remark brings me to the question which I would ask you in confidence, and which, as you are now going out of the country, I hope you will candidly answer."

"What is it?" asked Shack, looking a little uneasy.

"It relates," replied Fisher, "to the singular change in old Mr. Hosmer's conduct, which so speedily brought about my marriage with his niece, and the no less singular circumstances attending his death. Now, I was always satisfied, Shack, that you could throw some light on this mystery, if you chose; and your answer to one question, very probably, may explain the whole. What was it you whispered to him, that produced such a terrible revulsion of feeling, the violence of which, in his then weakened state, it was thought, occasioned the rupture that killed him?"

"Why, you can't have any suspicions, Esquire Fisher, that I intended it should, or supposed it could, have any such effect," answered Shack, with an air of concern.

"O, certainly not; but what was it?"

"You don't intend to make use of it against me, no how?"

"No, no — go on."

"And you won't tell of it — not even to your wife?"

"I am as anxious as you, Shack, that the matter should be buried in oblivion. But I wish to know for other reasons than mere curiosity — fear nothing, and proceed."

"Well, I just hinted to him who the ghost was — that's all."

"Ah! — the ghost — who was it?"

"That can't be spoken — but I can guess how it was, perhaps, if that will do."

"I will hear it, and then judge."

"Well, you know that the old man and I slept in rooms that joined, and our beds stood abreast against opposite sides of the partition, in which there was a door, that had long been nailed up, right between us. Now, the ghost might have found out, somehow, that the lower panel of that door had become so shrunk that it could be pinched out with a jackknife, leaving a hole under the beds, where a chap — say of about my size — could have crept through, put back the panel, risen up from the floor with a sheet round him, delivered his message from the other world, unlocked the old man's door, and have been off to bed and a snoring, before a frightened man would be apt to rally to try to catch him."

"I see — I see — the ghost stands revealed. But perhaps you can guess, also, what that message was, which you think it might have delivered."

"Well, I fancy it didn't say much, the first time, but only groaned and complained of being disturbed in the grave at a brother's doings. The second time it did the same, and made its appearance without saying any thing, trusting that would be enough. But finding it wan't, and that the old man was kinder defying it by fixing on the big lock, it came again and talked like a book, giving him forty days to make all right in, or he would be called for. Well, I don't know which was the most scart and worried about this last visit, the old man or the ghost, for it was that which turned the old man's hair so white, and so nearly upset him. But it fixed him about right, and the business moved after that to some purpose, as you yourself know."

"A strange and cunning plot," said Fisher, thoughtfully; and I can hardly wonder that it produced, with the operation of a guilty conscience, such an effect. But what induced you to divulge this to the old gentleman?"

"Why," replied Shack, "I had got a peep into that bunch of papers he gave you, and found all right. Well, as you was married and had the papers in your pocket, as I supposed, I thought every thing placed beyond a rip up; and when the old man called me names, and ordered me to quit, I was tempted to humble him on the spot; so I up and told him — sooner than I intended, for it was agreed I should tell him before long, lest it should shorten his days."

"Agreed! agreed with whom?" eagerly asked the other, catching at that word.

"Why, I didn't say any thing about any whom," said Shack, a good deal disconcerted.

"No," persisted Fisher, "but you used a word that has given me a clew to another part of the secret, which I was particularly anxious to learn. And you need not deny, Shack, that you have had the assistance of a well-known, shrewd manager, in this affair."

"Well, well," replied Shack, with the chagrined air of one who has unintentionally committed himself; "suppose a certain man did help at the planning, and perhaps write off the words for the ghost to use on the occasion, it only proves that two heads were better than one, if one was a sheep's head, as the old man used to call me. But you needn't ask me to say another word about this last part of the story; for I promised to keep it forever in the dark."

Fisher now rose and paced the room a moment in deep thought; when he turned to the other and said,—

"Shadrack, though you have unintentionally been the means of having my fortunes associated with a painful event, yet there is no denying your agency in making them. Here," he added, pulling out a hundred dollar bank bill, "take this, in addition to what we have already done for you, and with it my best wishes for your success and happiness in life."

The same day Fisher executed a deed to Squire Stacy, and sent it to him enclosed with the following note:—

"I send you herewith a deed of the little farm and cottage of mine, down the river, which I have heard you praise frequently, I think.

"Shack left this morning for the west; and before I suffered him to depart, I succeeded in drawing from him, for the first time, the secret of the '*ghost*,' though he only left me the means of conjecturing, as I know well enough I have done correctly, who was the main planner of the singular experiment, which had a so successful but melancholy termination. Please accept the gift; for, however you or I may look upon that affair, you are entitled to receive from me, for other and earlier benefits, this memorial of my gratitude. Yours, &c.,

"LOT FISHER."

THE

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SHAKER LOVERS,

AND OTHER TALES.

> "To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
> One native charm, than all the gloss of art."
>
> GOLDSMITH.

PREFACE.

The following tales, though relating to matters of a domestic and local character, are yet founded more strictly on facts than any of the author's composition. All of them, indeed, are but illustrations of the actual incidents by which they were suggested, with little other variation than what would naturally arise from the introduction of scenery and dialogue in bringing about the results, and, perhaps, we should add, from the exercise of the license generally conceded to the writers of such stories — that of making any alteration in the grouping, which will heighten the interest of the narrative, or add to the effect of the development of the plot.

MONTPELIER, 1852.

THE
SHAKER LOVERS.

CHAPTER I.

I WAS once, upon a warm summer afternoon, journeying on horseback in that wild and picturesque tract of country, in New Hampshire, which borders on the upper portion of the mountain-born Merrimack, when a dark thunder cloud, that had been gathering, unperceived by me, in the distance, rose up suddenly from behind the screening hills, apprising me at once by its threatening aspect, and the rapidity with which it was rolling towards me, that a thorough drenching was only to be avoided by an immediate flight to some place of shelter.

Applying the spur, therefore, I put my horse to his best speed, and fortunately succeeded in reaching a substantial looking farm-house by the roadside, just as the big bright drops of rain, as if shaken down by the crashing peal of thunder, that heralded their descent, came merrily dancing to the smoking earth.

While standing in the open shed, that I had been so lucky as to gain, listening to the roar of the elements, and marking that almost terrific sublimity with which a thunder storm in the mountains becomes invested, the

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owner of the establishment, a fine, hale-looking man of about forty, came out, and very courteously invited me into the house, adding at the same time, that he thought, from the unpromising appearance of the clouds, I might as well make up my mind, at once, to remain with him through the night.

As it was then late in the afternoon, and the rain still continued to pour down, with little prospect of abating in time for me to resume my journey before dark, I soon concluded to accept the proffered hospitality; when I was immediately ushered into the house by my kind entertainer, and introduced to his interesting family, as "a stranger who had been induced to put up with their poor fare for the night."

I had already been struck with the appearance of thrift and good management in every thing about this establishment without, and my admiration was now equally awakened by the neatness and rustic taste of all within, and the peculiar quiet and order with which the family concerns seemed to be conducted under the superintendence of my hostess, who was one of the most comely and engaging matrons I remember ever to have seen. I very soon discovered my host to be a man of much native shrewdness, and of fixed and well-formed opinions on almost all subjects that presented themselves; and these qualities, united with a spice of sly humor and a good tact for description, failed not to impart a high degree of piquancy and interest to his conversation. After the excellent supper, with which we were soon favored, was over, the household affairs regulated, and the smaller children disposed of for the night, the amiable mistress of the house took her knitting-work and joined us in the sitting-room, adding a still further interest to the converse by her quiet presence, and the well-timed and pertinent remarks which she occasionally threw in on the different subjects that were introduced. The conversation at length turned on the Shakers, an establishment of whom I had visited that very morning. Perceiving that my host appeared to dissent from some general remark I had made in praise of that singular society, I turned to him and said,—

"You believe them to be an industrious, quiet, and very honest people, surely — do you not, sir?"

"Industrious and quiet enough, doubtless, and just as honest as other people, and not a whit more so," he replied.

"Why, I had supposed them," I rejoined, "not only peculiarly honest and sincere, but in a great degree devoid of all those passions and vices that most move and agitate the rest of society."

"All that, in the exterior, they generally present, I grant you; but are you willing to take that as a criterion of their true character?" he asked.

"By no means," said I.

"Well, sir, could you lift the curtain, and see all that this sober and wonderfully honest exterior is sometimes made to conceal, you might, perhaps, be a little less inclined to exempt them from the common feelings and frailties of other people. I have half a mind to tell you a story of an affair which occurred some twenty years ago at the very establishment you visited, and which would show —"

"Now, don't, husband!" interrupted my hostess, with a deprecating look.

"Only by way of argument, wife," briskly replied the man, casting an arch look at the other. "I want to show him that love and intrigue may sometimes be found under a broad brim as well as a narrow one."

"O, pray left us have it — go on, go on, by all means," I eagerly interposed, delighted at the novel idea of a love story from such an unpromising source as that of the Shaking Quakers. With another roguish glance at his slightly disturbed, though now acquiescent companion, my host, after a brief pause, began: —

It was a delightful evening in the month of October, and the setting sun was throwing his parting beams over the yellow forests of the surrounding uplands, whose burnished foliage threw back the mingling streams of reflected light, and spread a red, quivering glow over the slumbering waters of the Mascomy and the beautiful meadows that lie stretched along its shores. Nearly the whole of the Shaker family, numbering at that time something less than a hundred, were in the field, a short distance from the pond, engaged in gathering the rare fruit of their extensive orchards — the women, with their hand-baskets, picking the choicer kinds for market or for winter preservation, and the men gathering and conveying to the teams, stationed at different points of the field for the purpose, that part of the fruit which was destined for the ordinary uses of the society. The almost exact uniformity in the fashion and color of their dresses produced a singular sameness in the appearance of them all; but this was more particularly the case with the females, whose neat, prim dresses of never-varying slate color, white linen kerchiefs, and snowy caps, surmounted by their low, plain bonnets, from which peeped their thin, pale visages, all seemingly marked with the same demure, downcast, and abject expression, might have disposed an ordinary spectator, as they were moving about the field as silent and gestureless as a band of automatons, to look upon them with sensations much resembling those we experience in beholding a flock of wild fowls, where an inspection of one is an inspection of the whole. A closer observer, however, in examining the face and figure of each, would have discovered that here, as well as elsewhere, Nature had not forgotten to be partial in the distribution of her favors; and that here, as well as elsewhere, were those on whom the gift of personal beauty had not been so altogether charily bestowed; and among the latter class there was particularly one, whose rounded, symmetrical person, fair and blooming face, and intelligent and sweetly-expressive countenance, all strikingly contrasted with the drooping forms, plain features, and passive, unmeaning looks of most of her unattractive companions.

Just as the last rays of the sinking sun were fading from the lofty summit of the distant Kearsarge, the word was passed for the people to leave work and return to their houses. As the company were promiscuously, though in their usual quiet and unsocial manner, retiring from the field, one of the men — a dark-eyed, compactly-built young fellow of about twenty-one, bearing a large basket of apples upon his shoulder, contrived to cross the path of the young Quakeress just described. While doing this, and when directly before her, at a few yards' distance, he made a seemingly accidental misstep, which suddenly brought his basket to the ground, and sent its contents rolling over the grass around, till they met the feet of the approaching maiden, who instantly paused and smiled at the little mishap which had thus oddly interrupted her in her course. The young man immediately threw himself upon his knees among the scattered fruit, as if intent only on gathering it up; but while his hands were busily employed for that purpose, his eyes turned with a quick, eager look upon the face of the girl.

"At the elm-tree, Martha," he said, in a low, hurried tone; "meet me at the elm-tree, at the lower end of the orchard, immediately after worship."

"It is dangerous — dangerous, Seth," replied the maiden, slightly coloring, and casting an uneasy glance around her.

"Now, I do beseech thee, Martha!" he persisted imploringly. "I have matters of great moment to impart to thee; and it may be the last time — yea, it will be, if thee refuse me now. Will thee not come, then?"

"Perhaps —" answered the girl, after a hesitating pause, in which she threw a look of inquiry and concern upon the youth, but seemed to suppress the question which rose to her lips; "perhaps — that is, if I can get away from the buildings without being noticed. But thee need not have spilled thy apples for so poor a purpose, Seth," she added, with a faint smile.

So saying, she turned hastily away, and with quickened steps pursued her course after her retreating companions, while the other now proceeded in earnest to pick up his scattered apples. This being completed, he was about to rise, when, looking around him, he encountered the gaze of a man peering at him from under the low-hanging branches of a neighboring apple-tree. A glance sufficed to apprise the young man of the character and object of the interloper; for in the thick, dumpy figure, little hooked nose, whitish gloating eyes, and ill-omened countenance of the man, he at once recognized one of the leaders of the society, and the one above all others whose notice, at this juncture, he would have been most anxious to avoid.

"Well, make the most of it, thou vile seeker of accusations," indignantly muttered the young man between his teeth, as with a look of defiance he shouldered his basket, and proceeded homeward, followed at a short distance by the object of his aversion, who did not seem inclined to make any immediate use of such discoveries as he might have made with his eyes, for the distance precluded the possibility of his hearing a word that had been uttered.

But before proceeding any further with our story, it may now be as well, perhaps, to speak a little more particularly of the different characters we have introduced, and advert to such circumstances of previous occurrence as may be necessary for a full understanding of the situation in which they relatively stood towards each other, at the time chosen for their introduction.

CHAPTER II.

Seth Gilmore had been an orphan almost from his childhood. At the death of his last-remaining parent, he was taken home by an uncle — an old bachelor of considerable property, to which it was supposed the boy would eventually succeed. But in the course of a year or two, another and a much older nephew was taken home; and he, being of a selfish, intriguing disposition, soon contrived entirely to supplant the former in the affections of the changeable uncle, who, not long after, was induced to give the unoffending little Seth to the Shakers of the establishment of which we are speaking. Here continuing to remain, he became, as he grew up, noted among the family for his faithfulness, activity, and capacity for business, and, before he had arrived at the age of twenty, he was acknowledged by all to be one of the most skilful and efficient hands on the farm. So far, nothing important had occurred to him to vary the dull monotony of the Shaker life. But now Seth began to think for himself, and became desirous of acquiring information — a very great error, he was taught to believe by the leaders, who hold that "ignorance is the mother of devotion," and that the youth, and all the common members of the family, should yield implicitly to those who are gifted to think for them and instruct them in all that is necessary to be known. The young man, however, wilfully persisted in his notions; and, by the promptings of this heretical spirit, he sought the acquaintance of two or three young men of the *world* (as all without the pale of the society are termed) who occasionally visited the establishment for the transaction of business or from motives of curiosity. Being eager of inquiry and quick to comprehend, he soon gained information from these which showed him the falsity of many of the strange ideas and impressions he had there imbibed respecting society at large, and otherwise afforded him the means of judging from which he had been wholly debarred; for it is the settled policy of the leaders of this people, in order to make faithful and contented subjects, not only to instil into the minds of their youth the greatest possible abhorrence of the world, which is constantly represented as dishonest, licentious, and every way corrupt, but to guard with untiring vigilance every avenue of information that might have a tendency to undermine or diminish the prejudices and opinions thus inculcated. Seth's mind, however, was of a cast which, when once called into action, was not easily to be thus trammelled; and the doubts which his own reason at first suggested being constantly strengthened by the facts gathered in his intercourse with these young men, and the books that he borrowed of them and secretly read, in spite of his masters spiritual and temporal, he at length became a confirmed disbeliever in the creed to which he had been brought up, and began seriously to meditate on the expediency of sundering the ties which bound him to the society. But before his views had become very definitely settled on these subjects, or any plans of future action matured, the Shaker leaders themselves made a movement which was intended to anticipate or remedy any evils of the character just named that might be growing; for these wary men, who watch the intellectual progress of their youth as anxiously as ever did a pedagogue that of his pupils, though with far different motives, began to perceive, about this time, that our hero's mind was becoming rather dangerously expanded; and, although not apprised of the means or extent of his information, yet judging from what they had noticed, that he could not long be retained without more than ordinary inducements, they held a secret consultation, and finally came to the sage conclusion that Seth's merits were such as entitled him to promotion. Accordingly, they proposed, unexpectedly to him, to make him an assistant deacon, or one of the overseers of business, naming some future day, not far distant, for him to enter on the duties of his office, and be admitted to a seat with them in the council, which met from time to time to deliberate on the temporal concerns of the family. This gave a new direction to his thoughts, and for a while quieted his growing discontent. Still extremely anxious, however, to know more of the world, he soon claimed the privilege of going abroad on missions of trade — a privilege which he knew was sometimes accorded to those exercising the office that had been offered him, provided they were considered sufficiently tried and trustworthy. But in this fond wish of his heart he was unexpectedly doomed to disappointment, for which he was indebted, as he soon discovered, to the influence of one man, the person we have already introduced as playing the spy upon the young couple in the orchard. This man, who went by the appellation of Elder Higgins, had for some time manifested towards Seth an unusual degree of coldness and distrust, which the latter, till now, had but little heeded. But this last act caused his ill will to be heartily reciprocated on the part of the young man; and circumstances soon occurred which made the breach irreparable. These circumstances were found to have reference to a third person — the young, innocent, and lovely Martha, towards whom the elder, about this time, began to pursue a course of conduct as strange as it was questionable.

Martha had been brought to this establishment, when eight or ten years of age, by her parents, both of whom, at the same time, joined the family, turning into the common fund the whole of the little property they possessed. All the acknowledged relations between parent and child from that moment entirely ceasing, the little girl was left wholly to the guidance and instruction of the elders and eldresses, to whom the care of the youth is intrusted; and, through her docility and her meek and confiding disposition, she had readily imbibed the doctrines, and, for the greater part of her girlhood, implicitly trusted in the creed that was taught her, exhibiting, in her exemplary conduct, a bright pattern of all that was esteemed good and lovely among the family. But as she verged upon womanhood, and began to give herself to reflection, her naturally clear and discriminating mind — moved, perhaps, by the associations of her childhood that still hung about her, or the observations she had made upon the conduct of some of the leaders — forced upon her questions and doubts which greatly perplexed her to answer or solve. These, it is true, at first, through the pious impulses of her truly devotional heart, were often rejected as the temptations of Satan; but they as often returned to disturb the quiet of her pure and gentle bosom; and at length, in spite of her strivings to the contrary, she became, though far less decidedly than the young man we have described, a disbeliever, at least, in many of the dogmas of that creed which she had been taught to look upon as infallible.

Such was Martha Hilson; and it was nothing strange that two such young persons, of the different sexes, as she and Seth, in the daily habit of seeing each other, and possessing characters as congenial as they were, in many respects, distinguished from those around them, should attract each other's particular notice. Nor is it much less to be wondered at, perhaps, that such notice should be followed by the springing up of mutual sympathies in their bosoms; though that these sympathies should be defined and acknowledged by their true name and made known by reciprocal avowals, was, indeed, at such a place, a rare occurrence. But Love is a cunning deviser of occasions; and, as difficult as it might be in this case, he at length found a way by which the young couple in question eventually discovered the nature of those feelings that were silently drawing their hearts towards each other. For a long time, however, no word or communication ever passed between them, save that which was conveyed in the language of the eyes. But after a while, the silence was broken, as they casually met in the yard, by a simple inquiry for some third person, and by as brief an answer. This was followed, after another interval of perhaps a month, when they again accidentally met, by the interchange of a few words on some common topic. And, at length, on a similar chance occasion, succeeded a proposal, on his part, to loan her a book; which, after some hesitation, she accepted, with the promise to peruse and return it at a time and place which he proposed for the purpose. An excuse for meeting being thus found, occasional interviews followed, though at none of them was a word breathed by either expressive of those feelings of which each felt a trembling consciousness as the true secret of their being thus brought together. These interviews, moreover, were of the briefest kind, and indulged in but very rarely; for, aware that it was one of the distinguishing articles of their creed, that "*the corruption of man is the attachment of the sexes*," and, consequently, that all intercourse which might lead to such attachment should be strictly forbidden, they knew how closely they were watched, and how surely penance of some kind or other would follow a detection of their meetings, however innocent the object. And such had been the extreme caution with which this intercourse had been managed, that they felt sure it could not have been discovered; and they supposed it remained wholly unsuspected. In this supposition however, they soon found they had over-confidently counted. Something in their demeanor, some unguarded look, when they publicly met, or some brief absence of both at the same time, had attracted the notice of the prying Higgins; and, his jealousy being thus aroused, he commenced a system of secret espionage upon the young couple which would have conferred credit on a minion of the Inquisition; the result of which was, that he became convinced of the existence of a forbidden attachment growing up between them, and strongly suspected them, though wholly unable to ascertain it for a fact, of holding clandestine interviews.

This personage, whose manner was as hateful as his countenance was repulsive, and whose whole character was a strange compound of the fanatic, the Jesuit, and the voluptuary, was an elder in the church, in which, through his pretensions to "*leading gifts*," or direct revelations from above, and his intriguing and ambitious disposition, he had gained an influence even greater, perhaps, than the "*elder brother*" himself, as the chief ruler of each Shaker family is denominated. And his ambition being not satisfied with his spiritual dominion, he aspired to, and by similar means obtained, an equal ascendency in the management of the business and temporal concerns of the establishment. Exacting the most rigid obedience from all, requiring the most implicit faith in all the ultra doctrines of his creed, and ever untiring in searching out delinquencies in others, while he shielded his own under the very convenient dogma handed down by Mother Ann Lee, for the special benefit of the peculiarly gifted, like himself, that "*to the pure all things are pure*," he had become fairly an object of dread among the people. For these reasons, then, if they had no others, it will be readily seen how much our two young friends had to fear from the sanctimonious elder; but they had additional reasons: he had, for some time, shown himself remarkably sensitive in every thing that related to Martha; and no sooner were his suspicions fairly awakened respecting the attachment between her and Seth, than she was summoned to meet him at the confessional alone, and in one of the most secluded rooms in the buildings. This was several times repeated, to the great horror of the distressed maiden, while it awakened the most painful apprehensions in the mind of Seth, who had become apprised of the circumstance, and but too well conjectured the secret motives of the elder in summoning her, instead of him, to meet him in private; though what passed on these occasions he had no other means of judging, than by the mingled expression of grief and outraged feeling, which very visibly marked the tear-stained cheeks of the poor girl on her return from the scene of her trials.

With Seth a different course was taken; and, though no rebuke was openly administered, or even one word was any where said to him respecting the offence of which he, in common with Martha, was suspected to be guilty, yet he soon found that he was not, for that reason, any the less marked for punishment. He soon discovered that the elder was secretly attempting to undermine his character with the family; while a system of petty annoyances was made to meet him in every thing he did, till his life become one of constant vexation and misery; and, being no longer tempted by the proposed office without the coveted privilege of going abroad, he again began to meditate about leaving the society. But checked in this wish by a want of confidence in his ability to succeed in the world, of which he was so little informed, and above all by his love for Martha, and his fears for her safety, marked, as he believed her to be, as the victim of the licentious elder, he here also became the prey of conflicting emotion. The treatment of his malicious prosecutor, however, at length drove him to a final decision; and, having formed a new plan in regard to his fair friend, whom he had been so reluctant to leave, he waited only for an opportunity of seeing her alone, (from which, through the precautions of the elder, he had been for a long while debarred,) before carrying his resolve into execution. With these remarks, we will now return to the events which form the action of our story.

CHAPTER III.

On returning to their buildings, after the labors of the field were over, the family, as usual, soon repaired to the rooms allotted to their daily repasts. For this purpose their tables were always spread in separate buildings, one for the ordinary male members and for the females, and one for the leaders; the two former of which are furnished with plain, substantial food, while the latter is loaded with the best that the land is capable of affording, and not unfrequently with foreign luxuries. For these dignitaries, if they do not always go on the principle of indulgence involved in the reported saying of the "*elect lady*," whose authority we have before quoted, that "*spirituous liquor is one of God's good creatures*," have at least no hesitation in acting generally on the assumption, that the *gift* of good living is peculiarly their own.

Immediately after supper, the whole family assembled for worship, in the house especially consecrated to that purpose. But so well known is their meaningless mode of worship — their long-drawn, nasal chant of Hottentot gibberish, set to the "inspired" tune of, perhaps, Nancy Dawson, or the Roving Sailor, (for their tunes, as well as the words, they contend, are inspired,) their formal, unvarying, kangaroo-like dance, performed with uplifted hands and various contortions of features, or the occasional exhibition, by some freshly-inspired elder or eldress, of a new *gift* for clapping the hands, for shaking, jerking, jumping, stamping, and groaning — so well known are all these, that we will pass over them for matters more immediately connected with our story; and for this purpose we will now repair to the trystic tree of the persecuted lovers, who had generally, as now, fixed upon, for their interview, the hour immediately succeeding worship, which was allowed the different members of the family for attending to their individual concerns, and which, therefore, afforded opportunity for an absence less likely to be noticed by the Argus-eyed leaders.

The broad, bright harvest moon, rising majestically over the eastern hills, was beginning to pour down her floods of quivering light upon the quiet scene — now striking upon the taller, then the shorter shrubbery of the field, and seemingly converting its pendent boughs into glittering tissues of silver — now bursting in brightness upon the waveless waters of the extended pond, and now glancing abroad upon the whole of the surrounding landscape, and lighting it up with her dim and solemn splendors.

The young man, the first to reach the spot, stood pensively leaning againt the trunk of a wide-branching elm, standing but a short distance from the margin of the water. As the moonlight gleamed across his face, tokens of deep and struggling emotions were there visibly depicted; and even a tear might occasionally be seen to start out and glitter upon his manly cheek.

Presently the white, fluttering robe of a female was seen glancing among the obstructing trees of the orchard, and rapidly gliding towards the spot. In another moment the light figure rushed into the opened arms of the young man, their heads were dropped on each other's shoulders, and, for a brief interval, not a word was spoken.

"O Martha, Martha!" at length uttered the young man in tones of deep and troubled feeling, and again was silent.

"Thee seems much agitated to-night, Seth," said the girl, in a meek, inquiring tone, after waiting a while for the other to proceed.

"I am, Martha," he replied; "my heart is indeed tried — sorely, most sorely tried."

"And why art thee thus disquieted, Seth?" again tenderly asked the girl; "and why," she continued in a tone of gentle expostulation, "why hast thee urged me to this meeting, when thee knows that I am not without my doubts and misgivings about communing with thee in this manner; and when also thee so well knows the great risk we both run of being discovered and punished, and I, particularly, of being brought to shame before the people, or punished in other fearful ways?"

"I know — I know all, Martha, and should be grieved to be the means of causing thee trouble. But so many things have happened since we met, and I had so much which I desired to say to thee, that I could not find it in my heart to go away without seeing thee."

"Go away, Seth? Surely! hast thee well considered?"

"Yea, long and deeply. I can no longer endure the vile misusage I have lately received; and I can no longer endure to be a slave — a slave to those who would fetter and degrade both the body and the mind; and therefore I have fully determined that this night I will leave them."

"But whither would thee go, Seth? — into the wide, wicked world?"

"If I thought, Martha, that I should find the people of the world more wicked than some of those I shall leave behind, I would remain. But of that I have no fears; and it is not that which now troubles and perplexes me."

"If we have been taught aright, what should trouble thee more, Seth?"

"Ay, if aright; but thee already knows my opinions of the absurdity of much of our creed, and the falsity of half that is told us. No, it is no scruples of that kind, but my doubts and fears about the reception I may meet with in the world, of whose ways I know so little, and in which I must appear so foolish and awkward. I am ignorant, Martha, ignorant as a child, of all that I should know."

"But does not that spring from pride of heart, Seth, which, under any good creed, thee would be taught, and should strive to banish? It appears to me thee should have better reasons."

"Well, I have other reasons, and they are with me, I confess, much stronger ones; but I know not that thee would consider them better. It is," — and the youth paused and hesitated, while the wondering maiden threw an innocent and inquiring look upon his sorrowful and agitated countenance, — "it is," he resumed, at length mastering his emotions, "it is the thought of leaving thee, Martha, which wrings my heart — of leaving thee among this people, to be subjected to the wiles and persecutions of that designing — "

"O, name him not — name him not, Seth!" quickly interrupted the girl, with a shudder, which but too plainly told her fears and abhorrence of the man about to be mentioned.

"I should not, Martha, but I have noticed that which has filled me with alarming conjectures — with fears for thy safety; and I would that thee tell me what he proposes to thee."

"I cannot — I cannot; but, O, if thee knew my troubles, Seth!" and the poor girl, at the thought thus called up, dropped her head on the other's shoulder, and wept as if her heart would break.

"The wretch, the accursed wretch!" exclaimed the young man bitterly.

"Nay, nay, do not curse, Seth," sobbed the girl, making an effort to check her emotions; "that is a gift belonging, I think, only to the Great One above, who metes out justice to the sinful, not as man metes it, under the influence of blinding passions, but according to the proper measure; and he, we must remember, can protect the innocent as well as punish the guilty; and though my trials are indeed sore, yet I trust that that good Being will still, as he has thus far done, preserve me guiltless and unharmed."

Each being absorbed in the thoughts and feelings which the conversation had excited, there was a short pause in the discourse, during which the maiden gently disengaged herself from the partial embrace of the other, and wiping her eyes, resumed her usual tranquillity.

"Martha," at length said the young man, with an air of embarrassment and a slight tremulous accent.

"What would thee say, Seth?" asked the maiden innocently, seeing the other hesitated to go on.

"Martha," resumed the youth with an effort, "Martha, does thee love me?"

"Why — why," replied she, now embarrassed and hesitating in turn — "why, we are *commanded* to love one another; are we not?"

"Ay, Martha; but does thee regard me with that feeling which the world calls love?"

"I hardly know what to tell thee, Seth; I have often greatly feared that my heart was an erring one. I have tried to bestow my love on all; but I may have sometimes thought, perhaps, that thee was getting rather more than thy share."

"Thy words are precious to my heart, Martha. Let us then cherish that feeling towards each other, and permit it to lead us to its natural consummation. Thee knows, Martha, that the love of which I speak, when crowned by marriage, is allowed and approved by the good and wise of every sect but our own. Thee knows, also, that it is sanctioned and blessed by the good book, which I lent thee on purpose that thee might read the whole, instead of only such parts as our elders would have us take as our guide, cunningly denying us the free use of the book, because they fear to have us read and reason the rest — not because, as they pretend, we should pervert it."

"Thee bewilderest me, Seth. I will confess, I have, at times, thought that there is reason in what thee now says; but I have nearly as often feared, that it was only the promptings of vain fancies or sinful inclinations. And it is so different from what I have always been taught, that it sometimes makes me tremble, lest I should be left, at last, to harbor a belief which may be wrong in itself, and prove ruinous to my soul's interests."

"It is not wrong," warmly urged the young man; "it surely is not wrong, Martha. It is right; thy reason tells thee it is right; all nature confirms it. The Bible, when properly consulted, answers yea. Come, then, Martha, come with me. Let us go into the world, where there will be no mean spies to dog and torment us — no tyrants to prevent our innocent actions, and make them an excuse for prosecuting their own foul designs — none to molest or make us afraid — where, united as one, never more to part, we will live and be free to love, and in that love and freedom find our solace, our comfort, and lasting felicity. Come — O, come, come, Martha, and fear not — with my own hands I will support and provide for thee, and in my own heart I will cherish thee through all the changing scenes of life."

" O, tempt me not — tempt me not, Seth!"

" Do not call it temptation, dearest one. Sooner would I suffer all that wicked men could inflict, than lead thee astray. I mean it — I think it for thy good, as much as for my own happiness. No, it is not temptation; it is but the pleadings of wisdom and of love. Fly with me, then, this night and this hour — fly with me from the persecutions, the miseries, and the dangers that here so thickly beset thee, to safety and happiness."

" Nay, nay, Seth," replied the maiden calmly and firmly, after appearing to struggle a moment with her conflicting feelings — " thy proposal is a bold and a startling one; it is also, to me, a new and an unexpected one. I have not considered, and may not now accept it; and, moreover, I may not now longer remain with thee. I must return to the buildings."

" And am I never to see thee more?" asked the other, sadly.

" Why, if thee will indeed leave us," she replied, lingering and hesitating — "unless, perhaps — unless thee could return, at some appointed time and place —"

"Will thee, then," eagerly inquired the young man — "will thee meet me here, four weeks from this night?"

"If permitted, I will, Seth."

"And be prepared to go with me?"

"Again I may not promise; but I will weigh thy proposal with kindly intent. Now fare thee well, Seth."

"Fare thee well, beloved Martha — if thee can stay no longer, fare thee well, with many, many blessings; but remember, O, remember!"

Fondly and anxiously gazed the young man after the maiden, till her retreating form was lost to his view among the intervening shrubbery, when he appeared to rouse himself from his tender reverie to the purpose now remaining to be accomplished; and, with a firm step and resolute air, he bent his course towards the shore of the pond, where he knew a boat belonging to the Shakers was moored.

CHAPTER IV.

Although the Shaker leaders mainly depend, for retaining their subjects, upon the impressions of aversion and hatred of the world which they so sedulously implant in the bosom of their youth, aided by the extreme ignorance in which they are kept for that purpose, and by which they are generally rendered as helpless and passive as could be wished, yet force, whatever may be said to the contrary, is, or at least was formerly, not unfrequently resorted to for the purpose of restraining those detected in attempting to escape. Seth, therefore, with a view of avoiding collisions growing out of any attempt that might be made, in case he had been suspected and watched, to prevent his going away, deemed it best to depart in a direction and in a manner which the Shakers would be the least likely to suspect him of taking. In pursuance of this plan, he had determined to take the boat and cross over to some point which would place him beyond the family possessions, within the boundaries of which the pursuit of their fugitives was usually confined. Congratulating himself on the result of his interview with Martha, which, besides filling his bosom with the blissful consciousness that his love was reciprocated, and inspiring his mind with the joyful hope that the prize of his affections would soon be his, had passed over, as he had supposed, undetected, he pursued his way with a light and rapid step along the path leading to the water.

He had not gone many rods, however, before, to his utter surprise, his old persecutor, the sleepless Higgins, stepped out from behind a covert, and, with a look of malicious triumph, confronted him in his path. Deeply vexed, but neither daunted nor turned from his purpose, the young man paused, and threw back a look of indignation and scorn on his detested opponent; for perceiving the elder to be alone, and conscious of his own bodily powers, he disdained either to cower or flee, but, with an air of cool defiance, stood waiting his movements.

"Ah, thou vile young heretic!" at length exclaimed the elder tauntingly; "I have caught thee at last, then, in thine iniquities, eh? What was thee saying to the maiden?"

"What thee will not be likely to be much the wiser for," indignantly replied Seth, who felt confident that, whatever the elder's luck had been as a spy, he could not, from the distance of his position, have gained much in the character of an eavesdropper.

"Ha! dost thou defy thy appointed rulers, young man? Confess thy sins unto me, lest I make an example of both thee and her in punishment of thy heinous offences."

"Hypocrite, I know thee, and for myself I defy thee! But I bid thee beware how thee shall further persecute that innocent girl; for as sure as thee injures a hair of her head, I will hunt thee while I live, and haunt thee when I am dead."

Accustomed to witness only tokens of the most abject submission in the deluded people over whom he had so long tyrannized, and totally unprepared for such bold language from the youth, whose spirit he had greatly underrated, the astonished elder stood a moment fairly choking with rage, unable, from the violence of his passions, to utter a single word.

"Get — get — get thee back to the buildings!" at length he sputtered in exploding rage. "Get thee back, thou audacious — thou — thou God-forsaken reprobate! Get thee back, I say, instantly!"

"Man, I shall not obey thee!" said Seth in a cool, determined tone. "I no longer acknowledge thy authority; and, from this hour, I am no longer one of thy blinded and deluded people. I go hence," he added, turning out of the path and attempting to pass the other.

"I will detain thee — I will seize thee — I will curse thee, and, verily, I will smite thee!" again exclaimed the fuming elder, springing at the other and making a desperate grasp at his collar.

The young man, however, was not taken unprepared for the onset; and the next instant the wrathful Quaker was sprawling upon the earth. Bounding forward for the pond, with the object of getting out upon the water before his discomfited antagonist could recover himself and reach the shore in pursuit, Seth quickly gained the landing, hastily unfastened the skiff, and leaped aboard; but before he could succeed in clearing the boat from the shore, and as he was stepping backwards, with handled oar, to take his seat in the stern, the infuriated elder came puffing in hot haste down the bank, and dashed into the water up to his knees after the receding boat, which even at that moment had just passed out of his reach. But, espying the end of a tie rope, which, in the hurry of unfastening, had not been taken up, and which was now dragging through the water within reach, he instantly seized it and gave it a sudden and furious jerk. Unconscious of the oversight he had committed, and therefore wholly unprepared for this movement, the young man lost his balance in the violence of the shock, was precipitated backwards over the end of the skiff, and instantly disappeared beneath the surface. With a desperate effort the elder first drew the skiff up high and dry on the shore, then, hurriedly catching up an oar and springing back to the water's edge, he held the formidable implement uplifted and drawn back, as if in readiness for a fatal blow the instant his victim's head should reappear on the surface. In a few seconds the youth came up, just out of the reach of the weapon; when, perceiving the threatening attitude of his antagonist, apparently determined on his destruction should he attempt to come ashore, he seemingly became panic-struck and confused, and, after glaring wildly around him an instant, sunk again with a gurgling sound beneath the surface, to rise no more to view.

With a look of still unmitigated malice and ferocity, and with the same menacing attitude, the ruthless elder stood waiting for a second appearance of his victim for a full moment, when he began to exhibit tokens of surprise, and lowered his weapon a little, still keeping, however, his eyes keenly fixed on the spot. After waiting in vain nearly another moment for the drowning man to rise, the elder became thoroughly alarmed, and, throwing down his oar, hurriedly retreated a few yards on to the bank. Here he turned and threw another anxious and troubled look upon and around the fatal spot. A few faint bubbles, successively rising to the surface, alone answered his inquiring gaze; and, reading in them conclusive evidence of the horrid truth, he gave a convulsive start, and fled in terror towards the buildings as fast as his quaking limbs could carry him, mumbling and chattering to himself as he went,—

"Now, who would have thought! If the youth could have swam — And am I to blame that he never learnt to swim? Of a surety, I am not. And then, did he not lift his hand against a gifted elder of God's church? and, moreover, have I not saved the family boat, which he was about to purloin? Verily, I have done a good thing; though, I think, I will not name the matter to the people — no, lest it lead to the temptation of evil speaking against rulers, and, peradventure, get to the world's magistrates. And then, again, there is the youth's property, which he was so froward and perverse about relinquishing to the church. Nay, I will not let the affair be known to any, but go to work right cunningly, and secure it all for God's heritage. Yea, verily, I have done a good thing."

Thus strangely reasoning, and thus desperately grasping at salvos for his troubled and guilty feelings, the terror-stricken elder reached home, and, without uttering a syllable of what had happened to any one, immediately betook himself to his solitary lodgings, not there, however, to find peace and repose, but to turn and writhe under the scorpion stings of conscience — that unescapable hell of the guilty, which retributive Heaven has planted in the bosom of man for the certain punishment of his crimes.

CHAPTER V.

Meanwhile the lovely and conscientious Martha, wholly unapprised of what had befallen her lover, retired to her peaceful pillow, and endeavored to reflect calmly on the new and interesting subject, which her recent interview with him had opened to her mind. But finding herself unable to do this, from the thousand crowding thoughts and sensations which combined to swell the half-fearful, half-delicious tumult of her gentle bosom, she discreetly deferred the task for a cooler moment, and having piously commended herself to the protection of her Maker, yielded her senses to those quiet and peaceful slumbers, that constitute not the least among the rewards of virtue and innocence. On awakening the next morning, her thoughts immediately recurred to the subject that occupied her last waking moments; and, as she now figured in her mind her lover, far on his way from the place, rejoicing in his freedom from the oppression he had at length escaped, she again and again recalled the tender professions he had made, and ran over the arguments he had advanced in urging her to leave her present situation and go forth with him into the world as his companion for weal or for woe. And the more she thought of the proposed step, at first so startling, the less fearful did it appear. The more she weighed his reasons with those she found herself able to bring up in refutation, lighter and lighter grew the objections which had caused her to hesitate, even in giving him a definite promise of acceding to his request when they should again meet; and as her scruples yielded, and one after another gave way, the unchecked pleadings of her own heart came in, and soon decisively turned the already inclining balance, leaving her mind now free to wander unhesitatingly over the new and bright field of destiny which had thus been presented to her view.

After indulging in her pleasing reveries as long as inclination prompted, the maiden arose, performed the duties of her simple toilet, and was on the point of descending from her chamber to join in performing the domestic concerns of the morning, when her attention was arrested by an unusual commotion among the people below, which she soon ascertained, from some words that reached her ear through the partially opened door, to be caused by the discovered absence of Seth, for whom search had already been made, but in vain. The consciousness that within her own bosom she harbored the secret of the missing one's absence, which she might not reveal, made her, for the first time in her life, feel like a guilty one; and, not daring to go down, lest her appearance should betray the agitation she felt, she paused at the head of the stairs, and stood some time endeavoring to compose her feelings and gain a command of her countenance, which should save her from showing any excitement that might not be natural to the occasion. But while doing this, the poor girl was little dreaming of the thousand times more difficult task in reserve for her — that of controlling her feelings under the heart-crushing blow which she was destined the next moment to receive. For the appalling announcement was next heard passing from mouth to mouth among the family, that Seth was drowned in the pond, the evidence of which, in addition to his unaccountable absence, was found in the circumstance that his hat had been discovered floating near the shore, while, at a little distance, one of his shoes had been espied sunk on the bottom, which had been fished up and identified.

It can be much better imagined than described what were the feelings of Martha on hearing these mournful tidings. No word, or sound, however, escaped her lips on the occasion. She turned deadly pale, indeed, and, for a moment, leaned her head for support against the door casing; and this was succeeded by a quick heaving of her bosom, while, with clasped hands and closed eyes, her trembling lips moved rapidly, as if earnestly engaged in silent devotion. But the next moment, as she opened her eyes, and with a firm step descended from her room, a spectator would have detected nothing more in her placid, though pale and sad countenance, than he might have seen in the faces of the rest of the sisterhood, among whom she now immediately mingled.

Most of that day was spent by the Shaker men in dragging the pond in search of the body, from which operation Elder Higgins kept studiously aloof; though the nervous restlessness he constantly exhibited through the day, and the many anxious and inquiring glances he frequently cast towards those thus engaged, plainly told the painful interest he felt in what was going on. The search proved a vain one. This, however, did not lead any one to doubt that the young man's fate was any different from the one first supposed, as the body, it was conjectured, had floated off and sunk in some of the deepest parts of the pond. But although all were unanimous in the opinion that Seth had met his death by drowning, yet, with regard to the manner in which the casualty could have happened, there were many and various minds; some supposing that he must have waded in to secure something which he saw floating near the shore; others, that he had risen in his sleep and gone in; while yet others considered either of these suppositions to be highly improbable, since some of the young men now made known the fact that Seth was an expert swimmer. These and many other conjectures, equally erroneous, were formed respecting the mysterious event, till, wearied with the fruitless discussion, it was given up as a case entirely hopeless of elucidation, and it was, therefore, permitted to rest.

Seth had been a peculiar favorite with the family generally, and his loss, for many days, cast a deep gloom over the minds of the little community, who were thus unexpectedly called to mourn his premature decease. The impression, however, like all others of the kind, wore gradually away from the minds of all except the bereaved Martha and the conscience-smitten elder, from whose bosoms the memory of the lost one, for reasons peculiar to each, was not, as may well be supposed, so easily to be erased.

Although the circumstances in which Martha was placed forbade any manifestation of her peculiar griefs, and wholly precluded her from communicating them to others, and receiving in return those alleviating sympathies which it is the privilege of ordinary sorrow to receive, yet none the less heavy for that fell this blow of affliction, and none the less keenly was felt the anguish which now in secret wrung her guileless and faithful bosom. Young Love was beginning to shed his sweet and happifying influences over her pure and gentle heart, and his twin angel, Hope, had just showed his snowy pinion to her unaccustomed vision, pointing her to a land of earthly felicity, which never before, even in her brightest dreams, had been pictured to her mind. But all these grateful feelings had been suddenly chilled and frozen in the current that was so blissfully wafting her away to the promised haven of happiness — all these bright visions had vanished, leaving her future not only blank and cheerless, but dark with portents of persecution and woe, from which there was little hope of escaping. These circumstances combined to render the poor girl's loss no ordinary bereavement; and most persons of her natural sensibilities would probably have sunk under the weight of the affliction. But Martha was a Christian; and she meekly bowed beneath the chastening rod, and turned for consolation to that life-spring on high, which is never long a sealed fountain to the true and devoted followers of Him who once himself knew earthly sorrows.

But while Martha was thus comforted and sustained, no such consolation remained for the despicable wretch who had been the cause of her troubles; and the more he tried to still his startled conscience, the more did its accusing spirit rise up to disquiet him, not only for the hand he had in the young man's death, but for the part he had previously acted towards him, in his general misusage, and more particularly in an affair to which only a slight allusion has been made. About a month previous to the time of which we are speaking, a stranger arrived from the neighborhood of Seth's early residence, bearing for him a letter, which he expressed a desire to deliver in person; but the young man being at work in the woods, some distance from home, and the stranger being anxious to resume his journey, the letter was at length intrusted to Higgins, on his promise of delivering it to Seth as soon as he returned. Having repeated his injunctions, the messenger departed, not, however, till the inquisitive elder had fished out of him, as cautious as he evidently intended to be, some clew to the contents of the letter. And no sooner was the stranger's back fairly turned than Higgins retired to a private apartment, and broke open the letter, which proved to be from a neighbor of Seth's uncle, whom we have before mentioned, and which announced the successive deaths, within a few days of each other, of that uncle and the nephew living with him, by which event, it was stated, as no will had been made by either, Seth had become the legal heir to all the estate thus left, consisting of a good farm and considerable personal property. The writer closed by advising the young man to leave his present situation, come home, and take possession of his property. After reading the letter carefully over several times, the perfidious elder committed it to the flames, and spent the remainder of the day in devising and settling his plans, and in drawing up for Seth's signature an acquittance to the family of all the property of which he had, or might, become the inheritor. And the next day, after having smoothed the way for the attempt, as he supposed, by an unusual display of affability and parent-like kindness, he cautiously broached the subject to the young man, tried to induce him to sign the paper, falsely affirming it to be one of their regulations to require such an act of the young members of their society, whether they had any property or not, when they arrived at legal age, at which Seth, as it happened, had, a few days before, attained. The latter, however, secretly meditating upon leaving the family soon, had no notion of cutting himself off from any right of property which might some day accrue to him, though now he certainly had no such expectation; and he therefore firmly refused to comply with the elder's request. After renewing the attempt several times, and resorting to every art and falsehood which he thought likely to aid him in his purpose, Higgins was compelled to relinquish his fraudulent design, with no other result than that of exciting the suspicions of Seth that there might have, indeed, something occurred at his uncle's, in his favor, and of hastening his determination to leave, and go and see for himself.

It was no wonder, then, when all these injuries, closed as the dark catalogue was by the death of the victim, rose in review before the mind of the guilty elder, that his conscience troubled him. He had not, it is true, really intended quite to destroy the young man's life; but he could not disguise from himself that his acts, malicious and wicked in themselves, had as much produced the fatal result as if his own hand had dealt the death blow, and that, too, under feelings but little less holy than he need to have possessed to have rendered the deed the foulest in the list of human crimes. In vain did he try to shut out these disquieting thoughts from his mind; in vain did he try, by quibbling and sophistry, to still the voice of conscience; and he soon became the prey of the most horrible fancies. He remembered the accidental threat made by Seth among the last things he uttered — "*I will haunt you when I am dead;*" and the fearful words, "*I will haunt you when I am dead — I will haunt you when I am dead,*" rang constantly in his ears. And so strong were his guilty fears, and so nervous and excitable had he become, that to him the menace was often literally fulfilled in the dread shapings of his distempered imagination. By day he appeared abstracted or restless — now heedless and lost to every thing around him, and now wildly starting at the rustling of every leaf; and by night roaring out in his sleep, and disturbing his wondering people by his strange and almost unearthly outcries.

Such was the punishment of the miserable elder; but whether this was not rather the result of his fears than any sincere repentance tending to make him a better man, we will not attempt to decide. One thing, however, is certain — it operated greatly to the relief of the before-persecuted Martha; for, from that eventful night on which she parted with her lover, she saw, for several weeks, no indications of any renewal of her trials. Much, indeed, did she wonder to what cause she owed this happy exemption; though she believed it, without being able to tell why, to have some connection with the fate of Seth, concerning which a horrid suspicion occasionally flitted across her mind. She tried, however, to banish such suspicions from her thoughts, and charitably strove to believe that her persecutor had been brought to condemn his own conduct towards her, and had, in consequence, laid aside his designs against her peace. But she at length began to perceive that her hopes were to be disappointed; she again began to perceive that, in the demeanor of the elder towards her, which told her that she was still the marked victim of his unhallowed designs. And from day to day she once more lived in the constant dread of being again summoned to the scene of her former trials. Nor was such summons long delayed. One day, as the family were retiring from their noon meals, the elder approached the terrified girl, and notified her to meet him alone, after worship, the coming evening, in the room which he had formerly desecrated by his infamous conduct. But the hapless maiden was not reserved for so wretched a fate as that which seemed to hang so menacingly over her. An unexpected incident intervened between her and that dreaded hour which was destined to form the most important era in her life, while it brought defeat and confusion upon her enemy.

CHAPTER VI.

It was a mild and pleasant afternoon in November, just four weeks after the melancholy event before described. Martha was sitting in one of the common working-rooms of the women, at work with several of the sisterhood, some of whom, like herself, were engaged in sewing, some at the loom, and some at the distaff. As she sat plying her needle, an air of deep pensiveness, sweetly tempered, however, by resignation, was resting on her lovely brow. She had been viewing with dismayed feelings and gloomy apprehensions the dismal prospect before her; but having schooled those feelings into submission to whatever fate Providence might allot her, she had turned to the images of the past, and her mind was now wandering among the dearest memories of her existence. She recalled the almost forgotten circumstance, that the ensuing night was the one proposed by her departed lover for his return to meet her, and a thousand mournful fancies took possession of her mind. She imagined how, had her lover lived, her heart would now be fluttering at the thought of the approaching meeting; and then her excited imagination took wing, and she wondered if it was not true, as she had sometimes heard, that the dead were permitted to keep the appointments made by them while living, and come in spirit to the place to meet and commune with their friends; and, if so, whether, should she repair to the trysting tree, at the appointed hour, Seth would not be there to meet her. Faith and love answered yea; and conscious of nothing which should cause her to fear such a meeting, at which, perhaps, heavenly counsel might be imparted to guide and direct her in her threatened difficulties, she half resolved to brave the summons of the elder to meet him at the same hour, and go to keep her appointment with the deceased. While she was thus indulging in these sadly-pleasing reveries, her attention was arrested by the sound of a strange voice in the yard below, belonging to some one who had just arrived, and was now engaged in conversation with several of the Shaker men. Thinking there was something peculiar in the careless, rattling manner of the new comer's discourse, she arose and went to the window, when it was with a mixture of wonder and surprise that she beheld the singular and vagabond appearance of the man who had attracted her attention. His dress was not only tattered and patched, but ill fitting and whimsical, consisting of small-clothes altogether too big, with a coat as much too little; and these were surmounted by an old straw hat entirely rimless before, and not much better behind. He was evidently quite a young man, and, but for a certain kind of foolish, staring cast of countenance, would have been accounted very good looking. He seemed quite at home among his new acquaintances, and was not at all bashful about making inquiries, many of which were so very simple and childish as to provoke a smile upon the sober visages even of the elders themselves. After asking a thousand foolish questions, and rattling away a while disconnectedly and witlessly enough to have made a good prototype for John Bunyan's Talkative, he carelessly observed, that, as for himself, he was now entirely out of work, and out of any home; and he really wished he could find some good place to live, where he could get enough to eat, for he sat a great deal by victuals.

Instantly taking the hint from this observation of the vagabond, and believing him to be about simple enough to make them a good subject, the Shaker leaders were not slow to propose to him to join the family, and at once to take up his residence at their establishment. To this the fellow replied, that he "had often hearn say that the Shakers were a mighty good sort of people, and he had sometimes been almost a good mind to go and live with them, but as he had never seen them before, he should like to go round and look at things a little before he told them for sartin about staying; and if they would give him something to eat, and then let him go all round where he was a mind to, that afternoon, he would tell them at night what he would do."

The man was accordingly soon furnished with an excellent meal, at which he appeared highly delighted. After this, free permission having been granted him for the purpose, he commenced his rambles over the farm, through the barns, yards, and outhouses, inspecting the crops, stock, and every thing connected with the establishment, with childish curiosity, and the greatest apparent interest, often leaving the objects of his examination, and running to the Shakers, to ask some question, and then racing back, in high glee, to his employment. When he appeared to have satisfied himself with viewing every thing out of doors, he went to the elders, and told them "he now wanted to see the *women works.* He didn't, to be sure, think women of much use generally, but, as they had to get the victuals and make the clothes, he should like mighty well to go in a while and see how they carried on."

Although this was contrary to their general custom, yet the leaders, conceiving they had the making of a good proselyte at stake, and evidently viewing the fellow as a weak-minded, harmless creature, soon concluded to humor him in this freak, as they had done in every thing else; and therefore they told him to behave well, but go where he pleased.

Quickly availing himself of the permission, he began the rounds of the different female lodges, making, however, but a brief stay in any one till he came to the room where Martha was at work with the small party of her companions. Here he leisurely walked round, viewing, with an air of wondering simplicity, the work of these demure artisans, making his silly comments, and, as usual, asking a variety of irrelevant questions, and, among the rest, the names of all the different females in the apartment.

Although the conduct and conversation of the stranger went clearly to show him to be a very great simpleton, yet there was a certain something about him which soon led the discerning Martha to doubt whether he was quite what he pretended, or rather, what all the rest of the family obviously considered him. And that doubt was greatly strengthened, in a short time, as, looking up, she caught him fixing a keen, steady, intelligent look upon her face, entirely at variance with the vacant, or idiotic, expression which had thus far seemed to characterize his features. And it was with a sort of undefinable interest that, the next moment, she saw him approaching her as he now did, with the remark that "he wanted to see what this woman was making too." Accordingly, he took up part of the work lying in her lap, when, as he was flourishing it about, under pretence of examining it, he slyly dropped a small, closely-sealed billet into her open hand. As soon as he saw her fingers close over the paper, he threw down the work over her hand containing the billet, and with the eagerly-whispered injunction, "*Read and give me token*," whipped off to look at something else which seemed suddenly to have caught his attention.

Feigning some errand out, Martha soon rose and disappeared on her way to her private chamber. In a few moments the stranger returned to finish his inspection of Martha's work, during which, though as busy and talkative as ever, he might have been seen to throw many a keen and anxious glance towards the door through which the fair absentee was expected to return. At length she made her appearance. A close observer would have at once noticed that, during her absence, she had been agitated by powerful emotions, and had wept profusely; and yet, through the subsiding shower, the first smile that had lit up her face for a month was stealing over her lovely features, while any thing but displeasure marked the general expression of her glowing countenance.

On entering the room, she went immediately to an eldress, and, with the air of one slightly annoyed, asked if she had not better hint to the man the propriety of his now retiring; and having received permission to do so, she approached him, and, with a look which he seemed readily to understand, observed, —

"Thy visit, friend, has been very acceptable, and thy communications shall be heeded; but we think that now, perhaps, thee would find more to divert thee among the men in the field."

With some careless remarks in good keeping with the character he had been acting, the man immediately left the apartment and proceeded to the field, where the men were at work, and where, in chatting with them, trying his hand occasionally at their work, and rambling over the premises, he spent the remainder of the afternoon apparently highly delighted with his situation.

CHAPTER VII.

When the family assembled for supper, however, the fellow was unaccountably missing; but the Shakers, having seen so much of his erratic movements, and supposing him still to be somewhere about the farm or buildings, did not seem to pay much attention to the circumstance, or think it worth their while to institute any search for him; and their evening meal, through all the different departments of the family, passed off with customary quietness.

After finishing their repast, as usual, the whole family, just as the stars were beginning to twinkle in the clear blue of the November sky, took their way to the house of worship, which was an unenclosed building opening to the road, a branch of which turned up and ran directly by the doors. The ceremonies of worship, also, were attended with no unusual occurrence, and being concluded, the assembly broke up to return to their respective lodges. But on opening the doors and coming out on the steps, the foremost of the company, to their surprise, beheld a horse and chaise drawn up within a few yards of the door allotted to the use of the females, the door for the males being some thirty feet towards the other end of the house. By the side of the horse, a man, young and neatly dressed, as far as his appearance could be judged of by starlight, stood holding the reins and whip, with his face turned towards the door, and in the seeming attitude of waiting. The women came hesitating down the steps, and, there coming to a stand, began timidly and silently to stretch forward their heads and peer at the mysterious stranger. The men, also, coming out, and seeing the unexpected visitant and his equipage stationed across the path of the women, began, with low-whispered inquiries of one another, to gather towards the spot. In this stage of the affair, Elder Higgins, who had purposed to remain in the house till all had retired, that he might pass unobserved to the room where he was expecting the next moment to meet the victim of his designs, became impatient at the tardy movement of the people, and came bustling through the throng, with a light in his hand, to ascertain the cause of the delay, when the stranger turned suddenly round and confronted him. The instant the light struck upon the face of the latter, the recoiling elder uttered a convulsive shriek, and, with wildly-glaring eyes and chattering teeth, sunk down upon the ground in horror and affright at the apparition which he believed he had beheld. A commotion was now observed among the huddling and startled females; and, the next moment, a light figure rapidly made her way to the front of the crowd.

"It is!" she exclaimed in low, eager accents, after a momentary pause. "It is — O, it is he!" she repeated, and, springing forward, threw herself into the arms of the stranger, who, lightly swinging her into the seat of his vehicle, turned again towards the crowd.

"Viper!" he exclaimed, advancing with brandished fist close to the appalled and nearly prostrate elder — "viper, thou art baffled!"

With this he turned quickly about, leaped nimbly into his seat by the side of the fair companion he had just placed there, applied the whip to his horse, and dashed forward for the main road, leaving the whole assembled family of Shakers standing aghast and bewildered with astonishment and perplexity at what had so suddenly and inexplicably passed before them.

As dreadfully frightened as the guilt-smitten elder had been, yet he was the first to comprehend the mystery and rally for the rescue.

"The fiend!" he fiercely cried, leaping up and pointing with frantic gestures after the departing carriage, "O, the fiend! The apostate, the reprobate, the godless reprobate is carrying off Martha! Pursue him! stop him! catch him! save her from the villain! Run—run, for your lives—or they will escape us!"

Roused by the commands and the eager and furious manner of their leader, the men, followed by the women, rushed promiscuously down the road in pursuit of the fugitives; but scarcely had they passed the line of the buildings in this disorderly rout, and gained the main road where it became enclosed by fences, when a rope suddenly sprang from the dust across the path against the legs or uplifted feet of the foremost rank of the pursuers; and the next instant a platoon of Quakers were rolling and sprawling on the ground, while those in the rear, unable to check their speed in time to save themselves, came, rank after rank, successively tumbling and floundering down at the backs of their fallen companions, till nearly the whole bevy were prostrate and scrambling on all fours in the road.

At this juncture the wild, rattling laugh of the missing vagabond was heard behind the stone fence over against one end of the mischief-making spring rope; and, the next instant, a gayly-dressed young man leaped lightly over the fence into the road, and made a brief pause a few paces ahead of the fallen and confused forces of the pursuing enemy.

"May be, friends," he said in a half-jovial, half-commiserating tone, as he glanced at the disorderly plight of his recent entertainers, "may be you don't know me with my Sunday clothes on. Well, well, good people, perhaps it *is* indeed rather a provoking case for you; but here are about twenty yards of good new rope which I will leave you, by way of amends for your hospitality this afternoon and your tumble this evening. It is the best I can do for you now, I believe; though if you should ever cage another such rare bird as the one just flown yonder, and should be in want of more rope — But I can't stay to chat now; so good-by, Thee and Thou, good-by to ye!"

So saying, and leaving the discomfited Shakers to gather themselves up in the best way they could, he bounded forwards a few rods, leaped upon a horse which stood tied in a nook in the fence, and galloped off after the receding carriage, now rattling away in the distance.

"And what then?" I asked, perceiving that the narrator had come to a stand, with the air of one who had arrived at the end of his story. "What then — what next happened?"

"Why, nothing very unnatural, I believe," replied my host, with a humorous smile, "unless you make out to the contrary from the fact that an old justice of the peace, living some eight or ten miles from the scene of action, was called up that night to do a little business in the marrying line."

"And the bride on the occasion?" I asked, somewhat puzzled to comprehend the development. "The bride was your heroine, Martha, of course; but the bridegroom? Not Seth, surely; for he was drowned, you know."

"Perhaps, friend," answered my host with waggish gravity, "perhaps he was not drowned as much as some, after all; but rising to the surface after his unlucky plunge, and seeing the wicked attitude of the elder, suddenly changed his plan, and so sinking under again, with some little show of drowning, and with a kick or two to make the bubbles rise, came up silently under a neighboring clump of bushes — crept away, with the loss of his shoe and broadbrim — went to a young farmer of his acquaintance — exchanged his wet Quaker gear for a decent suit of clothes, and set off for the residence of his late uncle, where he arrived the next day, and, to his agreeable surprise, found himself in possession of one of the best little farms on the Merrimack, and where, in due time, he, in conjunction with a new-made young friend there, concocted the plan which you have seen executed."

"A romantic coming out, upon my soul!" I exclaimed in delight. "Well, then, you knew the parties? — are they still alive?"

"Ay."

"Do they reside in this vicinity?"

"Ay, again."

"Why, I would go almost any distance to see them."

"You would have no very serious journey to perform for that purpose, sir," he replied significantly.

"Why? how?" I asked, still in doubt respecting the full development.

"Why, verily, my friend," said my host, casting an arch look at my perplexed countenance, and speaking in the Quaker dialect, "verily, thee art not so shrewd a guesser as I had supposed thee, else thee had smelt the rat long ago."

"Stupid!" I cried, "stupid indeed! But I see it all now. The hero, Seth, is here before me; and the heroine, the good Martha —"

"Run away," he interrupted laughingly, "run away, as you might have noticed, perhaps, at the beginning of the description by which she was introduced, as we went on with the story. But the hero, being more modestly described, made out to stand the racket without running."

"One more question only," said I. "The young friend who, in the character of a vagabond, took your letter to Martha, and so finely managed the affair —"

"Was also from this neighborhood," he replied. "You noticed, perhaps, as you came along, a mile or two back, a two-story white house, with an office in the yard?"

"I did — thinking it a very neat establishment," I answered.

"Well, sir," he rejoined, "that is the — though, perhaps, Esquire Wentworth would not thank me for telling of his pranks when he first started life as a lawyer. It was the making of the man, however. People, seeing how cleverly he had managed a love case, concluded he would be no slouch at a law case, if he had one. He rose rapidly after that. But enough of this. Seth and Martha, my children!" he continued, calling to his eldest boy and girl, still up and reading in the kitchen, "one of you take a mug, and the other a candle, and go down and draw us a mug of the best cider in the cellar. This Shaker story has made my throat as dry as a tin trumpet."

ETHAN ALLEN

AND

THE LOST CHILDREN.

It is often less difficult, perhaps, to awaken the sympathy of the reader by the portraying of fiction than by the recital of facts. And many a writer, we doubt not, who might have easily produced a very thrilling fancy sketch, has paused over incidents of actual occurrence calculated to arouse the deepest emotions of the heart, with a painful consciousness of his inability to present them in such a manner as should insure the interest and effect which legitimately belong to them. Such, at all events, are our feelings, as we take up our pen to describe an incident of the early settlement, well known and often rehearsed, among the unwritten stories of the times, by the inhabitants of that section of country where it occurred. And if we can but succeed in writing up to nature, or even exciting in the reader one moiety of the feeling that agitated the bosoms of the actors in the scene as it transpired, we shall not need a single touch from the hand of fancy to add interest or pathos to our description.

In the afternoon of the last day of May, 1780, the wife of a settler might have been seen sitting at her spinningwheel at the open door of her log cottage, situated in one of the secluded vales of Sunderland, an interior town lying along the western slope of the Green Mountains. The day being quite warm and pleasant, she had drawn out her wheel thither, that, while pursuing the labors of the distaff, she might inhale the odorous breezes of the season, and enjoy the wild but pleasing prospect presented in the thousand slopes and swells of the far-stretching mountain wilderness, over which Nature had just thrown her gorgeous mantle of living green, brightly relieved and variegated, at intervals, by the pure white of the blossoming shadwood, and the varying hues of other flowering shrubs, which, at that season, beautify the appearance and make sweet the breath of the forest. For deem not, ye book-made connoisseurs of the beautiful and magnificent — deem not the pleasures of taste exclusively your own, because you can give learned names to your sensations. The humblest cottagers of our mountains, though they may not be able to define their emotions in the exact terms of art, yet enjoy the beauties of nature with as lively a relish as yourselves, and are even more inclined, we have often thought, to view them with that higher, holier feeling which they ever should inspire — that feeling which causes the soul, as it contemplates, to send up the incense of its silent adorations to Him who made earth so lovely for creatures who so dully appreciate the boon, constituting, as it does, one of the most striking of all his manifold blessings.

The woman we have introduced was not only a wife, but a mother; and, while she was seen occasionally to send a glance of affection towards her hardy husband, bending over his hoe in an adjoining field, her eyes, beaming with all a parent's tenderness and pride, even still more often turned upon her children, two sprightly little girls, of the ages of five and seven, who were playing in the yard before her.

"Mother!" exclaimed the elder of the two girls, stopping short in her gambols at the thought that seemed suddenly to have struck her — "mother, when I went yesterday with father alongside of the woods over yonder, I saw — O, such sights and sights of pretty flowers! — adder-tongues, violets, and all, which he wouldn't let me have time to get. Now mayn't we go there and gather some?"

"I don't know about that, my child," good naturedly replied the mother. "You are such a little romp, that if you once get into the woods, you will be sure to run till you get lost, I fear, and —"

"O, but we won't go into the woods, only a little, *leetle* ways, mother," interrupted the child.

"And then," resumed the anxious mother, without heeding the interruption — "and then it is but a short distance to Roaring Branch, where you might get drowned. I had rather you would go to your father, children."

"Let us go into the woods and get the flowers first, and then we'll go to father. We won't get lost, certain, certain — so now do, mother," persisted the little pleader, looking up beseechingly into the other's face.

The mother still shook her head, but with so kindly a smile that the quick eye of the child saw that her purpose was won, and joyously shouting, "O, we may!" she bounded away, followed by her little sister, under the repeated, but scarcely heard or heeded cautions of the former, till an intervening swell hid them from her sight.

As the eye of the mother rested fondly and proudly on the receding forms of her children, she thought of what they were to her then — her comfort and her care — of what they soon would be to her — not only a comfort, but an aid in lightening the burdens and toils so heavily imposed on her and her companion, in their endeavors to subdue the wilderness, and create within its bosom a comfortable home. And as she thus turned to the future, imagination began to be busy with her bright pictures of coming prosperity and happiness; for in them, as usual, all the sunshine of life was gathered, and all its clouds forgotten. Beneath her glowing pencil the wilderness fast faded away; and in place of the humble log tenement, a large and commodious mansion rose to view, surrounded by smooth and fertile fields laden with products, and green pastures filled with flocks, or embowered with orchards bending with fruit; while she, the mistress of all, with the companion of her early toils, now beyond the necessity of labor, were reaping the rewards of all their privations and hardships in the enjoyment of the bounties by which they were surrounded — of the cheering presence of their children, budding into life, and attracting a pleasant social circle around them — the respect of society at large — perhaps the honors of the public, and every thing that could make their lives desirable, or in any manner heighten the picture of the happy domicile thus figured to her mind.

In reveries like these, in which many a poor first settler has found his only reward for a life of hardship, hours glided away unperceived by the entranced mother, till the descending sun, beginning to dip behind the lofty mountains bounding the vale to the north and west, caught her abstracted eye, and brought her back to the realities of life.

"My children! where are they?" was the first thought that crossed her awakened mind, as she became aware of the lapse of time since their departure. Suddenly stopping her wheel, she rose hastily to her feet, and after throwing a searching glance over the field where her husband was still at work, she ran to the top of the knoll, behind which they had disappeared. Here she paused, and ran her eye eagerly along the borders of the woods, bounding their little opening on the east. But no children greeted her anxious gaze. She then called loudly their names; but no sound responded to her call, excepting a hallo from her husband, who demanded the cause of her outcries.

"The children!" she almost shrieked in reply — "have you seen the children?"

"No — I thought they were with you," he answered, holding his suspended hoe in his hands, while he listened to her brief and hurried recital of the time and manner of their children's disappearance.

As she closed, the hoe dropped suddenly from his hands, and making his way with rapid strides, he the next moment stood before her, when mutely exchanging with her a look of agonizing intelligence, and bidding her follow, with that almost savage sternness which startled affection will often force into the manner of the most mild and gentle, they hurried forward to the woods. Here taking different directions, they at first proceeded along the borders of the forest around the whole clearing; and then, penetrating farther within the woods, they repeated their rounds, frequently pausing and calling aloud, but in vain, for their lost children. After hunting an hour in this manner, the now thoroughly-alarmed parents met again at the spot where they commenced their search.

"Run and raise the neighbors, wife," said the husband, in an agitated voice, "and tell them to come quick — quick," he added, as, with an uneasy glance towards the distant summits, where the fading of the last rays of the setting sun told him how little of daylight remained for the search, he again plunged into the forest.

Although the poor mother was already flushed with heat, and nearly exhausted by her exertions, yet she rather flew than ran to the house of the nearest neighbor, nearly a mile distant, and, as soon as she could get breath to speak, made known her trouble — the simple announcement of which was sufficient to arouse the sympathizing inmates to immediate action in her behalf, by starting off in different directions to spread the alarm through the settlement. The instant she saw the hastily-saddled horses mounted by the messengers, and put under whip and spur on their destination, she turned and sped back to her now desolate home, thinking she would there rest till the expected help arrived; when she herself would lead the way to the spot where the children disappeared. But little was the rest which her troubled spirit permitted her to enjoy. She would sit down for this purpose, it is true; but the next moment she would start up and run to the door to look out — return, sit down, and rise again to repeat the same motion; or, perhaps, she would run to her cupboard and handle over her dishes, but only to replace them, and proceed to something else, to be as unconsciously begun and as quickly relinquished.

In this manner did the distressed mother employ herself, till the sudden trampling of horses' feet brought her to the door, where she saw about a dozen men dismounting in the yard, whose presence she greeted with a shout of almost frantic joy. Among the new comers there was, fortunately, one whose well-known name was a host in every public gathering, when a united effort was required to accomplish the object in view; for, with a full share of the more common qualities of skill and energy, he possessed a remarkable faculty of inspiring in others that faith of success by which, not unfrequently, success can only be insured. That man was the celebrated Colonel Ethan Allen, who, to recruit a constitution impaired by the fatigues of the camp, and his long captivity, had retired to a farm in this town, where he was then an honored resident.

Allen now advanced to the bereaved mother, and, kindly saluting her, inquired the particulars of the disappearance of her little ones. She began to reply, but, with almost the first word, burst into tears; and pointing to her husband, who at that moment was seen approaching from the woods, she dropped on to a bench, and covered her face with her hands.

" Be of good cheer, dear madam," said the hero, deeply touched at her grief. " Bear up with fortitude, and confide in us soon to relieve you of your anxiety; for your children shall be found. I pledge you the word of Ethan Allen that I will return with them, or search till I die."

After learning the desired particulars of the father, who now came up, Allen held a brief consultation with those present respecting the manner of conducting the proposed search. And it was soon settled that every man should provide himself with a pine knot torch for the night. Such as could readily procure horns, or conch shells, were to take them to blow at intervals, for the purpose of keeping the company in a line, or near together; and, as nearly all came with guns, it was concluded to take them along also. But no man was to discharge his piece till the children should be found; when two guns, in quick succession, were to be fired as the signal.

These brief arrangements being made, the company, now every moment fast increasing by fresh arrivals, was put in motion by Allen, who was unanimously chosen leader, and marched forward to the border of the woods. Here they halted, and lighted their torches, it being by this time quite dark; when each man having taken his appointed station in a line, formed by placing the men about a dozen yards apart, the whole, at the word of command from their leader, entered the forest and began the anxious search.

Man happily seems endued with the privilege and power of deadening the sharpest stings of grief and anxiety by action; but no such privilege — perhaps no such power — remains for woman. The father of the lost ones, as deep as was his anguish, could yet endure it in silence, while mingling in the active exertions of the search. But O, what pen can describe the feelings of that agonized mother during the lingering hours of that dreadful night! Though surrounded by female neighbors, who had come in to assist, and who would have gladly encouraged and comforted her, yet she would listen to no words of comfort. But, restlessly moving about the room, and wringing her hands in tearless woe, she ceased not to bewail her children, whom she sometimes fancied in watery graves, and sometimes torn to pieces and devoured by wild beasts. Hope, indeed, might occasionally come to her relief, and her mind, for a moment, be diverted from its engrossing sorrow, as the sounds of horns, or the voices of the men, shouting to their fellows in the woods, struck her ear, or the gleaming of their torches caught her eye. But the imbittering thought would quickly return, and drive her to resume her ceaseless rounds about her room, till, compelled by utter exhaustion, she would throw herself on to her bed, and perhaps fall into a disturbed slumber — but only to start again the next moment, with an exclamation of anguish, at some fearful image which dreaming fancy had called up from the depth of her troubled spirit.

Thus with the poor mother passed this seemingly interminable night, and the morning light, so anxiously looked for by her, at length made its appearance, but only to disclose the scattering groups of the company returning from the woods, with slow and weary steps, and the thoughtful and downcast manner which plainly told that their exertions had been unsuccessful. They returned not, however, with the thought of relinquishing their object, but only to refresh and recruit themselves by a short respite for a renewal of the search. And, after as many as the house could supply had been furnished with food, and the messengers despatched to other houses for the purpose had returned with supplies for the rest, the company were again led back by their persevering leader to recommence, in other and yet unexplored parts of the forest, the search for the lost ones, of whom not a single trace had yet been discovered.

Another day of fruitless researches succeeded — another day of torturing anxiety and suspense to the pitiable parents, now giving way to despair and now clinging to hope, but to a hope continually growing weaker and weaker from the consciousness that every hour lessened the probability that their children would be found, or, if found, that they would be found living. Although the country for more than twenty miles around had been alarmed, and over six hundred men had by this time assembled and joined in the search — although miles of the dark and tangled forest had been carefully explored by the company, proceeding, now that their numbers were so increased, in a line at arm's length from each other, or always so near as to preclude the possibility that the lost could be passed over unseen — yet no traces of them had been seen, no clew discovered which could lead to any thing but the merest conjecture of their fate or present situation. And so deeply impressed were a large proportion of the company, before the close of this day, of the uselessness of any further search for the children, who, as they generally believed, must have been seized by the wolves or panthers, and borne off to distant dens to be devoured, that they would have relinquished the search and gone home, but for the constant and untiring efforts of their indefatigable leader, who, passing continually from one end of the line to the other, encouraged, exhorted, and implored them to persevere, and entertain no thought of yielding till the children, whether living or dead, should be found. And such were his powers of controlling the multitude, and infusing into them his own burning and confiding spirit, that their hesitation gave way under his appeals, and, in spite of fatigues and the faintness consequent on the scantiness of the supplies of food, which only could be brought to so many in the woods, they cheerfully continued their unpromising toils, not only through the dreary night that followed, but the greater part of the succeeding day, though with no other result than that of keeping alive, in the mean time, in the bosoms of the distracted parents, the forlorn hope which arose from the knowledge that the search was not yet relinquished. Perseverance, however, with a lessening prospect of success, could not always be expected in a body of men brought thus promiscuously together, and acting only from feelings of sympathy or the dictates of a common duty; and towards night, on this the third day of the search, small parties began to steal away. And the example operating on the rest, faint, weary, and despairing of success, the whole soon broke from a line, and retiring from the woods, followed in silence by their now sad and grieved leader, assembled at the house of the disconsolate parents.

All seemed deeply impressed by the painful circumstances under which they were now, for the last time, as they supposed, assembled at this abode of unmitigated sorrow. Though no one had announced that the search had been given up, yet all seemed to understand that such was the fact. Even the bereaved parents seemed perfectly aware of the melancholy truth; for, differently from what they had yet done, they now came out and took a seat together, after the manner of mourners at the last rites of the dead, on a bench near the door, in full view of the company, and there sat drooping with that air of hopeless grief which is only assumed under the sad consciousness that all is over. The silence of a funeral pervaded the whole assembled multitude, who, seated on logs and other objects, or lying in groups on the grass about the yard, seemed silently mingling their sympathies for the bereaved. And for nearly half of an hour, no movement was made and no loud word was spoken, when the singularly-gifted, and, to this day even, but imperfectly understood man who had acted as leader, and had now been standing aloof with a sad and troubled look, slowly mounted a large stump on one side of the yard, and raising his towering form, and glancing mournfully round over the assemblage, commanded attention.

"Men," he impressively began, "fellow-men, neighbors, parents, all hear me, for I can keep silent no longer; and if I should, it seems to me — to use the words of the good Book — that the very stones would cry out. I have been in battles, where the dying and the dead lay thick around me — I have spent months in the earthly hell of a British prison ship, where despair and death in their most appalling forms were daily before me; but they all furnished no scene to wring the bosom with commiseration like this. Look at that bereaved, heart-stricken pair!" he continued, while the big tears began to roll down his cheeks; "why are their bosoms thus heaving with convulsive sobs? and why is dark despair settling on their countenances, which, till now, have not been without the light of hope? Is it because their children are dead? No! for they, as well as ourselves, must know that it is yet quite too soon to settle down in that melancholy presumption. No, it is not this! But is it not because they see that we have come here to tell them — as we should, if we could find in our hearts to make the announcement — to tell them that we can search no longer for their children; that we are tired, and must go home to our business now, leaving their unfortunate little ones to perish miserably in the woods? Young men, who have often found strength to keep the woods a week, to hunt down some paltry wolf or bear, are you satisfied to give up after a search of forty-eight hours, when two human lives are at stake? Men, who have been with me in the war, and cheerfully undergone fatigues and hunger a hundred fold greater than those we have here experienced, are you also willing that your acts should tell the same story to this broken-hearted pair and to the world? And, lastly, parents, O parents! can you take this case home to your own bosoms — can you look on this distracted father and mother, and make their case your own, and picture to yourselves your own little ones lost in the woods, worn out, weary, and famishing, with no human face to cheer and encourage them — no human hand to minister to them — trembling with fear through the night, as the wild beasts howl around them, and wailing out their little lives in grief and hunger? Can you do this, and then coldly talk of relinquishing the search and going home? If you can," he went on, with the tears now falling in streams from his eyes, "go, go! and may the God of humanity forgive you and be merciful to you, when your own children, in turn, are lost and perishing in the wilderness! As for myself, I am now about to return to the forest, there, as I pledged myself to these poor parents at the outset — there to continue the search till the lost are found, or life be worn out in the effort. But can it be, friends and neighbors — to whom this is my last appeal — can it be that I am to go alone?"

"No — never!" shouted a dozen voices from different parts of the crowd.

"No, no! I will go! I shall go! we will all go with you, even to the end of your vow, noble colonel!" responded one and all, rushing forward with excited looks, and new resolution beaming through the manly tears, which had bedewed every cheek of that large assemblage, during the touching appeal of their idolized leader.

"God bless you for this, my friends!" exclaimed Allen, with emotion. "Depend on't, there's a providence in this new-born faith and resolution. Those children are yet to be found; and ah!" he continued, exultingly pointing to an ox team, containing several large baskets of provisions, which, driven by a boy, was seen turning into the yard — "ah, here is already an omen of our success in these supplies so timely forwarded by our thoughtful wives and daughters. Come, men, gather round it. Let each furnish himself with a good ration, and we will be off again to the woods; for we must bear in mind that an hour lost now may be death to the objects of our search."

The clouds of doubt and despondency having been thus dispelled, and a complete revulsion of feeling effected by the tact and rough eloquence of Allen, men forgot their fatigues, and every thing now proceeded with spirit and animation. The fresh arrivals of provisions was hastily distributed; and all other preparations being as speedily made, the lengthened column, headed by the now exulting leader, was seen deploying along the borders of the woods. Here they halted; and a brief consultation was held among the most prominent of the company, which resulted in the determination to push eastwardly, directly on to the mountains beyond the limits of their previous explorations. A party of four men, however, consisting of active and experienced woodsmen, were detached to the left to proceed up Roaring Branch, and follow it up to its sources in the ponds, in the gorges of the mountains, the upper part of the stream having been hitherto left unexplored in the search, on account of the supposed impossibility of the children having been able to penetrate so far through the rocky steeps and tangled passages which there environed its banks.

This being done, the company moved rapidly forward to the foot of the mountains, beyond which the search had not, in this direction, been extended. Here contracting their line so as to bring each man in view of his fellow, they began slowly to ascend the toilsome steeps, carefully searching every covert, and peering under every log, or tree top, in their way, which might possibly conceal the lost ones.

In this manner, about an hour had been spent, and nearly a mile searched over without discovery, when the word was passed by the leader, who had taken station and marched on the extreme right, to "halt, dress the line, and rest." And thankfully, indeed, was the order by this time received — for the men, now the excitement recently kindled by their ardent leader had died away, began to feel the effects of these superadded exertions; and most of them immediately dropped down on to the nearest rock, or moss banks, to catch what little rest their brief respite might allow; while they amused themselves in looking off from their elevated situation over the forest-clad hills and dales, which, broken only by the apparently small and thinly-scattered openings of the settlers, lay stretching in tranquil beauty beneath and before them, till the scene was closed on the north and west by the lofty mountains of Manchester, and the less elevated ridges of Arlington, whose empurpled sides now met the eye in striking contrast with the splendor which the setting sun was throwing over their burnished summits. But though thus beguiled a short time by the beauty and the novelty of the view here presented, as they looked on the scenes behind, yet, as they turned to the rough steeps and deep abysses of the route before them, and thought of the toils of the coming night, many a heart again desponded; and they wondered how they could have been induced to recommence the search with such spirit and hopeful courage. Their sad anticipations, however, were fortunately not to be realized; for while they were gloomily awaiting the expected order to move forward, the whole line were suddenly roused by the loud and startling report of one or more muskets, bursting heavily from the gorge about a mile to the left, and in the direction taken by the detached party before mentioned. In an instant, every man was on his feet, with the unspoken question on his lips — "Was that the first gun of the appointed signal?" And the sharply whispered, "Hush! hark! list!" were the only sounds that, for the next moment, could be heard along the line, as, with brightening eyes and ears eagerly attent, all stood breathlessly awaiting what they scarcely dared hope for — the completion of the signal. But the next instant, it came in another report from the same spot, that sent its reverberating echoes down the gorges towards them more distinctly than before.

"Found!" shouted the first man on the left; and "Found!" "found!" "found!" rang joyously swelling along the line, from man to man, till it ended in the stentorian shout of Ethan Allen, who, leaping high from the ground, sent onward the exulting announcement, "Found! Hallelujah to Almighty God, the children are found!" in a voice that was heard with a thrill of joy, even to the distant abode of the hitherto despairing parents. The next moment the wilderness shook with the answering discharge of every gun in the company.

The children were now found, it was evident; but how found? Whether living or dead, no one of the company nere knew; and few were willing to utter a loud conjecture, as, with common consent, they all broke from their stations and hurried towards that point in the woods from which the signal had proceeded. But leaving this exciting scene, we will now follow the small, detached party in the still more exciting adventures which resulted in the discovery just announced to the main company, in the manner we have described.

After passing rapidly over that part of their route which had been previously examined in the search, this little party continued to toil on through the tangled thickets and windfalls, or up the wet and slippery declivities, which they every few yards encountered, in following up the stream, till the increasing difficulties of the way at length caused the leader of the party to doubt the use or expediency of attempting to penetrate any farther; and he proposed a halt, for the purpose of consulting his companions.

"Is there any possibility, Bartlett," he said, addressing the man nearest to him, "that those children can have made their way through such a place any farther than this, or even so far, I might as well have said?"

"I should think not, Captain Ball," responded the person addressed; "but we will have Underwood and Bingham's opinions," he added, turning to the two remaining ones of the party.

"Why, I don't think it impossible," replied Underwood, "that they should get through these windfalls; for children will creep through smaller holes than we can; but the only question with me has been, whether they would naturally have kept on far in a course where the ground is so ascending, even as this ravine — much less up the steeps where the main party have gone."

"Well, now, that is no great question with me," remarked Bingham, who was an old and observing hunter. "I've always noted, that all the brute creatures in the woods, when frightened and confused by pursuit, invariably take up-hill courses; and why not frightened and confused children, who, in such case, could have nothing but instinct and natural impulses to guide or govern them? If you can tell me why lost and frightened brutes do this, or why lost and frightened children shouldn't, when brutes do, I should like to hear you."

This odd theory led to some further discussion among the rest of the party, during which the hunter walked on a short distance to a large hemlock-tree, standing near the stream, where some appearance had attracted his attention; and having carefully examined the spot, he called to his companions to approach.

"Here," said he, pointing down between the branching roots of the tree, as the others came up — "here I am quite sure something bedded last night, which I hardly think could have been a four-footed animal, as I can find no hairs in the place. The impression, be sure, is slight;

for the leaves, at this time, are so dry that nothing will leave one, not even footsteps, else the children could have been traced before this. But the appearance of this spot, taken in connection with that freshly-broken twig hanging there by the bark between here and the stream, as you see, inclines me to think the children staid here last night."

"I am willing you should have faith, Bingham," remarked Captain Ball, after examining the appearances to which the other had thus invited attention; but if it is grounded only on these uncertain circumstances, I fear it will avail us but little in our object. However, we will examine the place to some distance around; and if the children have really been here, we shall probably discover indications of it of a less doubtful character."

The adjoining woods were searched over to a considerable extent, but no additional indications were discovered; and the party, all but the hunter, again began to talk of turning their steps towards home, when the latter, who stood musing a little aloof from the rest, suddenly called on them to be silent and listen.

"What did you think you heard, Bingham?" asked Ball in a lowered tone.

"I can hardly tell," replied the hunter in the same tone, as he stood with an ear turned in the direction of the supposed sound, but if you were not so determined to beat me out of the belief of all my own senses, should say something that sounded like the faintish kind of a yelp with which a wolf generally begins a call for help; if it was, it will soon be repeated — now, hark!"

All listened in silence, and, in a moment, the long, savage howl peculiar to the animal just named was indeed heard rising distinctly on the breeze from some spot up the ravine, perhaps three quarters of a mile distant.

"A wolf, sure enough," said Bartlett.

"Yes; and if the children have gone this way, it is as I feared," added the less-experienced Underwood, with a sigh; "the wolves have devoured them."

"Not so fast, mister," interposed the hunter; "that howl may mean something a little more encouraging. But be quiet and listen — I am expecting a chorus to that tune in a minute or so."

They all again stood mute, and listened with increasing interest and anxiety, when the same wild howl, louder and more earnest than before, resounded through the forest; and, the next instant, another howl was faintly heard responding from a distant part of the mountain; and another, and another, soon followed, from different directions and distances, till the whole wilderness seemed vocal with their terrific music.

"The thing is settled," said the hunter, hastily repriming his gun. "The children are near that wolf which howled first — alive, too, or he would not have called for help. The pack that have answered him are most of them a mile or two off, but they will come like the wind. And we must be there before them, or the poor little ones are gone forever. Follow me, and keep up who can," he added, striking off like an arrow in his projected course.

"There is something in this; and, in God's name, let us on," exclaimed the now thoroughly-aroused Captain Ball, as, followed by his two remaining associates, he sprang forward after the hunter.

All by this time seemed impressed with the conviction that the issue of life or death to the children might now depend upon their speed; and on they bounded, from log to log and hillock to hillock, here gliding round an impassable jungle, and there leaping over a fallen tree or diving under it, with a celerity and progress which, in such a place, would have seemed incredible to any but the trained woodsman. But as great as was their speed, the hunter, who more than maintained his distance in advance, soon began by his beckoning gestures to urge them to greater exertions. Nor were they long at loss to perceive the force of the silent but significant appeals thus made to them; for the rapidly-nearing sounds of the gathering wolves, and their short, eager yells, that told their close approach to the scented prey, all made it evident that they were fast converging to the point of this fearful rivalry between them and the woodsmen, who, thus incited, strained every nerve, and inwardly prayed for new powers of speed, to reach the spot in season, but trembled as they prayed lest they should be one moment too late. A happier return for their exertions, however, was now at hand; for suddenly the hunter stopped short, and, after peering a moment through an intervening tree top down into a valley beyond, he turned to his companions, and motioned them to come on in silence. The next moment they were at his side, gazing down on a scene that caused their hearts to jump into their mouths, and tears to start in their eyes.

In an open space, about fifty yards in front of them, sat a large wolf on his haunches, headed from them and towards his companions, that were now plainly heard making their way through the surrounding thickets towards him; while on a flat rock, near the stream, a short distance to the left, stood the lost children, amidst an imperfect bower which they had constructed from the gathered branches of the hemlock. The youngest was clinging timidly to the oldest, who was menacingly brandishing a small stick towards the unheeding wolf, and, with a look of mingled fear and defiance, exclaiming, —

"Shoo! shoo! Go away, you great ugly dog; we are afraid of you."

With one glance over this exciting scene, every man instinctively brought his cocked gun to his shoulder.

"Stay," whispered the hunter, "more of the pack will be there in a minute; and when they appear, I will give the word, and we will let drive together. It will then answer for the signal to our friends, while we have the chance of giving to more of the cowardly imps a different supper from what they are thinking of."

The next moment five or six gaunt, hungry-looking wolves, one after another, came galloping into the open space occupied by the one before described, which now rose, shook himself slightly, and turned to lead the others to the promised repast.

"Here!" said the hunter; "catch a quick aim. Fire!"

With a single report, the four pieces sent their missiles of death upon the devoted pack; and the sudden sounds of floundering in the leaves, the sharp yelps, and the quickly-retreating footsteps which instantly followed, told the death of one, the wounding of others, and the rapid dispersion of the whole hideous gang of these brute demons of the forest.

"Now for the children," said Captain Ball, hurrying out from behind the screening tree top. "I will show myself to them first, and alone, lest they be frightened, while the rest of you see to the wolves, if any remain that want finishing; and then fire another gun to complete the signal."

While this last injunction was being obeyed, as it almost instantly was by the hunter by discharging his quickly-loaded piece at a limping wolf, of which he caught a glimpse retreating in the distance, the captain advanced about half way towards the covert of the poor, terrified little girls, who at the discharge of the guns had nestled down in one corner of their rude bower, and there lay clasped together and trembling in fear and dreadful apprehensions — less, however, of being devoured by the wolves, which they took, it seemed, to be large, gray dogs, than of being seized by those who had fired the guns, and who were imagined by them to be Indians, of whom they had heard so many tales of terror. But, on being quietly called by their approaching friend, the eldest girl rose, and after peering out at him a moment with a startled and doubtful air, timidly asked, —

"Who be you all?"

"We are all friends; so don't be afraid, my little girl," soothingly answered Ball.

"Not Indians, certain?" persisted the former in a smarter tone.

"O, no, we are your friends, as I said, and come to carry you to your father and mother. Will you go with us?"

"Yes, we will go with you, if you'll carry us to father and mother, if you be Indians," bravely replied she.

While the hunter was stripping off the skin of the slain wolf, which, with a hunter's pride, he claimed as the victim of his own shot, the others employed themselves in gaining the confidence of the recovered children, and refreshing them by feeding them with small portions of biscuits first soaked in the stream. And the former were so successful in winning upon the confiding hearts of the latter, as soon to draw from them the childish but affecting little story of their sorrows and adventures while lost and wandering in the dark and dreary woods. How, when they perceived they were lost, they cried and ran the way which they thought was towards home, till it was quite dark; when, tired with running and crying, they sunk down under a large tree, and slept all night; how, the next day, they kept on in the same way, sometimes finding juniper and partridge berries to eat, till they reached, about dark the second day, this place; when, making a bed and covert of leaves and hemlock boughs on the rock, they staid all night; during which the youngest was so sick and thirsty, that they got up, and, taking hold of hands, crept down to the water, drank, and returned; and, finally, how they had been here ever since, making their house better, and fearing to go away, lest they should not find so good a place as this, where they could find berries, and where they had seen nothing to scare them, till the big dog came and lapped his mouth at them, and would have bit them, if they had not thrown sticks at him, and kept him off till the guns killed him, and scared away the others that began to come.

Having thus spent a short time in calming and restoring, with as much food as was deemed prudent, the frightened and famishing children, the party was called together to depart; when two of the men taking each a child in his arms, and the others carrying the guns and the hunter's wolf skin, the whole set forward with quick and animated steps, to retrace their way down the gorge to the settlement, where they well knew minutes would now seem hours till they arrived.

If ever men felt proud and happy at success, it was this little band of honest-hearted woodsmen. And as they strode homewards through woods, with their living trophies, all unharmed and gayly chatting in their arms, their bosoms, at the thought of what they had achieved, together with the anticipated pleasure of restoring the little ones to the arms of their parents — their grateful bosoms swelled with emotions of happiness more pure, more elevated, more exquisite, than they would have experienced had half the treasures of the earth been unexpectedly won by them.

When about half way out to the clearing, they suddenly encountered the ardent Ethan Allen, hurrying on, at the head of the main body, to meet them. "Ah, ha!" exclaimed the hero, throwing up his hand in joyful surprise, "here they are, alive and well. Glory to God, it it is indeed at last accomplished! And now, my merry men," he continued, turning to his followers, "gather up, gather up here, and let every one give voice to his feelings, by joining in a round of cheers which shall make these hills skip like those described by the brave old David, of the Scriptures — there, halt! ready now!" he added, himself leading off in the "*three times three*" of such thundering cheers as never before rose from the wild glens of the Green Mountains.

The company, having thus given vent to their overflowing feelings, were now formed into a sort of triumphal procession, with the recovered children and their deliverers in front; when the whole, headed by their exulting leader, moved briskly on through the remaining part of the woods, till they reached the clearing; when, as the long column began to emerge into the open grounds, they were met by the anxious parents, who, having heard the cheering we have described, and, for the first time, found courage to leave the house with any expectation of meeting their children alive, were now, with a company of sympathizing females, hastening on to receive them. But who can hope adequately to describe that meeting, where tongues were mute, and overcharged hearts only spoke in the dumb tokens of quivering lips and streaming eyes? The men who had found the lost ones, and still bore them in their arms, had framed gallant speeches for this occasion; but they were all forgotten now, and the children were hurriedly passed to the eagerly extended arms of the parents, and by them convulsively clasped to their bosoms in silence. Even the iron-nerved Allen, usually so free and bold of speech, stood by and looked on without daring to trust his voice in words. And, for some moments, not a single articulate sound was heard among that touched and tearful group, till the spell was broken by the simple exclamation of one of the wondering children.

"Why, father and mother, what makes you cry so?"

"True, true, my little one," said Allen, dashing away his tears, and now finding the use of his tongue — "here we are, sure enough, all crying like a pack of great boobies; when, if any company on earth had reason to rejoice and be merry, it is we. Come, come, let us try to get our joy into a more natural channel, and then move on to the house." The head of the column was again brought to order, and passing on through the field, soon entered the yard of that house whose recent sorrows were now to give place to rejoicing and thankfulness. Here the company were formed into two extended lines, a few feet apart, and facing each other; when the grateful and overjoyed parents, each leading a child, that they might be seen by all, passed through them, followed by Allen, alternately awakening, by his lively sallies and timely remarks, the mirth and good feeling of all those around him, and declaring for himself that this was the happiest hour of all his life. After this gratifying ceremony was over, he once more mounted the stump, the rostrum of his former successful appeal, and, in behalf of the parents of the recovered children, poured forth the warmest expressions of gratitude to the company for their kindness and long-continued exertions, and ended by an ejaculation of thanks to God for his mercy and goodness in permitting those exertions to be rewarded with such signal success.

The assembly then, quietly dispersing, returned to their respective homes, each proud of his own share in the achievement, but prouder still of that of the distinguished leader, without whose presence all felt conscious the affair must have terminated in sorrow instead of rejoicing. And who shall say, great as the fame of Ethan Allen is, for deeds of noble daring and brilliant exploit, as a warrior — who shall say, that his brightest laurel was not won, after all, in that noble, though little known act of his life, which resulted in the recovery of the "lost children," in the wilds of Sunderland?

THE
YOUNG SEA CAPTAIN.

The traveller, in making the tour of New England, as he journeys along through that clustering range of smiling villages which, like a starry belt of the heavens, stretches round her peopled coasts, extending back many miles inland one way, and in an almost unbroken chain the other, from the Penobscot to the Hudson, will often find his attention attracted by some beautiful residence, standing, perhaps, aloof from all others, on a conspicuous elevation, or other eligible spot, and so far outshining them in the air of wealth, taste, and comfort that seems to surround it, as generally to excite the curious desire to know something of the character and fortune of the owner, or, at least, of the constructer of so imposing an establishment. And scarcely less often will he find, on inquiry, that this is, or has been, the residence of a retired sea captain, who, having made a fortune by professional services and trade on the perilous deep, has come here to spend and enjoy it, with the remainder of his days, in the comparatively tranquil scenes of village life. Well, who is better entitled to enjoy the fortune he has made, both on account of the toils, responsibilities, and dangers he has passed through in accumulating it, and the honest deserts of his character, than is generally the sea captain? For we do not believe,—and we speak not without a somewhat extended acquaintance,—we do not believe that a worthier class of men can be found (a class of men who possess, as a body, more of all the substantial virtues) who are more uninfluenced in their acts by the sordid calculations of self, or who are more alive to the calls of humanity, when they take their stand in society, than that of the masters of all the higher grades of our mercantile vessels. Nor is it very strange that they are so: they have been schooled to a life of important trusts and responsibilities, in which strict integrity and correct habits are made the test of success; while the scenes of trial and danger they so frequently experience have tended to teach them their dependence on Providence, and make them feel for the wants and sufferings of their fellow-men.

We once had the pleasure of forming an acquaintance with a gentleman of this class, whom we found in the enviable situation above described, and whose romantic and singularly good fortunes—seemingly the natural result, in his situation, of a trustworthy and benevolent character—would well warrant an enlargement into a volume, instead of the brief and simple narration in which we propose to give them.

Captain Loton was, emphatically, the architect of his own fortunes. Losing his last remaining parent at the age of sixteen, and being thus thrown entirely on his own resources, he left his native place, one of the interior towns of Massachusetts, and, without a friend to recommend or introduce him, without money, except a few dollars earned for the premeditated journey, and without any other than a common-school education, confidently set out on foot and alone for Boston, resolved on engaging in a seafaring life. He was not long, after reaching that place, in finding a situation in a merchant vessel, and he unhesitatingly entered as a raw hand, at the wages the owner was pleased to offer him. His first spare dollar was laid out for a work on navigation; and so intently did he apply himself to study, while becoming acquainted with the practical part of his profession, and so rapidly did he win the confidence of all by whom he was known, that at eighteen he was a mate, and at nineteen the master of a vessel trading between Boston and Havana, at which last-mentioned place his good conduct, together with his prepossessing exterior and youthfulness, attracted much notice, and gained him the appellation of the "handsome and trusty Yankee boy captain."

One day, in the early part of his career as commander, as he was walking the streets of that great emporium of the West Indies, from which his vessel was then on the point of sailing on her homeward passage, he noticed a well-dressed female, with a large work-basket in her hand, walking near him and in the same direction. The circumstance did not at first very particularly attract his attention; but perceiving, after going some distance, that she was still near, and making, as he fancied, some effort to keep pace with him, he slackened his speed, and finally turned round, and, courteously addressing her, asked if she was going far his way, naming the public house at which he lodged. "She was — and, perhaps, should call — at least, she had thought of calling at the very same house he had mentioned," she replied in a soft, tremulous tone, as she looked up timidly on the inquirer, displaying a fair, pale face, in which the traces of subdued sorrow and suffering were sufficiently visible to give eloquent effect to a countenance of great beauty and sweetness.

Captain Loton was at once touched with pity by her manner and appearance, and, in a tone of kindness rather than of gallantry, he immediately offered his services in carrying her basket. To this she silently assented, and he took the basket from her hand, little dreaming what to his future destiny would be the consequence of the act of that moment. He could not but notice, however, that, as she delivered him her burden, she seemed greatly agitated, and manifested a hesitation and reluctance which seemed strangely at variance with her first ready assent. But, attributing the whole to maiden timidity, or the fear that something wrong would be asked of her in return, he walked on in unsuspecting silence. After proceeding a short distance in this manner, the lady observed to him that she was under the necessity of making a brief call at the house then at hand, and, if he was disposed to continue his kindness, he might take her basket along with him, and deposit it in the hall at his hotel; and, throwing an anxious and troubled look on the other and his charge, she immediately disappeared. Proceeding directly to his hotel, Captain Loton deposited the basket in the hall, as requested, and repaired to the dinner table, where the guests were already assembled, and where he soon related his adventure with the fair unknown, jovially remarking that, when she called for her basket, he thought he should attend her home, and try to improve his acquaintance. The landlord, better acquainted with the manners of the town, and recalling the impositions that had there sometimes been practised on strangers by wanton females, in palming off their offspring, smiled, and began to rally him on the possibility that the basket in question might contain something for which the owner might not be likely to call very soon, and advised him to examine it. At that moment the cries of a child were heard issuing from the basket, and a roar of laughter burst from the gentlemen at the table at his expense. Though greatly surprised, and not a little chagrined, at this sudden proof of what his host had just suggested, Captain Loton yet bore the laugh and merry jokes of the company with unruffled good humor, and, rising from the table, he coolly proceeded to the basket, opened it, and found it contained, surely enough, an infant — a very pretty and healthy-looking female infant — in whose features he could clearly trace the lineaments of that pale and sorrowful face which had so won upon his heart, and which, one hour before, he supposed belonged to one as excellent in virtue as she was lovely in person. And he could not now feel to condemn her, dupe as he knew he would be considered of her artifice, or bring himself to believe that this seemingly unnatural act was committed by her except under some peculiar exigency. But however that might be, he knew he was now fairly saddled with a responsibility which he little coveted. Still he had too much independence of mind and benevolence of heart to suffer the ridicule of his acquaintance to drive him to neglect his charge, as much as he was at loss what to do with it.

" O, don't look so serious about it, Loton," said one of his acquaintances. " The city provides for such cases; send it to the almshouse."

" Never!" replied the other, " if money will procure it a better situation."

And, in pursuance of his benevolent resolution, he made immediate search for a nurse; and he was soon fortunate enough to find a good one, with whom he made a satisfactory arrangement to take the child to her house and keep it till she saw him again. He then went on board his vessel, weighed anchor, and set sail for home.

Soon after his return to Boston, Captain Loton was promoted to the command of an Indiaman, and made two successful voyages to the East. But his bosom had been touched, and, in spite of all his endeavors to banish thoughts which his better judgment told him he had little reason to cherish, the image of one soft, speaking countenance continued to haunt him, and his heart secretly yearned to resume an intercourse with that sunny garden of the ocean with which those truant thoughts were associated. As will be anticipated, therefore, he conceived a distaste to the East India voyages, and yielding his post to another, and accepting an offer he had received to take command of a fine vessel fitting out for the West Indies, he was soon on his way to the scene of his former adventure, which he reached after an absence of nearly three years.

As soon as the duties connected with the landing of his vessel would permit, Captain Loton went in search of his *protégé*, whom he found in the care of the same poor but worthy woman to whose trust the child was at first consigned, and to whose faithfulness to that trust a sufficient witness was seen in the neat and healthy appearance of the child herself, now grown from the helpless and unconscious infant he left her to an interesting little prattler.

" She recalls to my mind more and more of her mother's looks, every time I turn my eye upon her face," observed the captain with a half sigh, after musingly gazing at the object of his remark, during a moment when she rested from her childish pranks, and turned towards him with a look of wondering innocence. "But what do you call her?" he added, addressing himself more directly to the woman.

"Mary."

"Mary what?"

"Mary Loton, to be sure," replied the woman, with a queer, meaning expression.

"Why, you don't suppose this to be my child, except by its coming into my possession by finding, as the lawyers say in their writs, do you?" asked the captain in surprise.

"There are others that will have it so, at any rate," answered the woman.

"Well, I hope you have not believed them, and, least of all, so far as to prevent you from trying to discover the mother, as I requested you to do."

"No, I have not believed them, for I knew your character, and I have taken much pains in endeavoring to find out the mother."

"And with what success?"

"Little or none. No inquiries have ever been made for the child; and I think the mother, if not an irretrievably lost character, must have left the island immediately, — perhaps with some one of the many families that come to winter here from England or the American coast; perhaps she was herself a foreigner, and came here with them."

"Probably you are right; for an abandoned woman I will never believe her."

"I hope she was not; but whatever was the mother, her babe has proved one of the sweetest of children, and has served to supply in my affections, as far as any child not my own could, the place of the one I lost a few weeks before I took her. And, besides, sir, I should add, that, since the death of my husband, that happened the year after, as you may have heard, the liberal pay you authorized me to draw on your trading-house has been a great help to me; and I hope you will allow me still to keep your little Mary for you many years longer."

"Certainly; and with many thanks for the manner in which you have discharged your duty to me and to humanity."

During Captain Loton's stay in the city, he almost daily visited the child, and soon became so much attached to her, that he took more pleasure than ever in recalling the incident which gave him, as he now hesitated not to call her, his adopted daughter. During the following twelve years, the captain, once or oftener in each year, returned to Havana, and always provided liberally for the support and education of his charge. And although it required, with his own expenses, nearly all his earnings, yet this was done without any of that regret, that drawback of feeling, which too often attends ostensive benevolence, and makes charity little less than an abomination in the sight of Heaven. For his heart was ever warm with generous impulses, and never paused, while within the bounds of ordinary prudence, to call in the aid of arithmetical calculation to measure its munificence, and he continued to manifest towards the child of his voluntary adoption the affection and tenderness of a parent, and took a parent's interest in her welfare. She had now arrived at the age of fifteen — an age which, in that soft and quickening climate, confers the maturity of womanhood, and more perfectly, perhaps, than any other period, opens the blossom of female beauty. And she was esteemed as possessing an uncommon share of that more envied than enviable gift, unless united, as was happily the case in the present instance, with good sense and intelligence. Captain Loton, as may be supposed, was not a little proud at the development of such qualities in one whom he had sacrificed so much to rear. And such was his attachment, that the rumor before mentioned, that she was his natural daughter, gave place to another, that his must be other than parental affection, and that he soon was to make her the partner of his life. This rumor, at length, reached the ears of both, and on both it produced nearly the same effect — that of aversion to the thought, at first, of beginning to look upon each other in connection with so different a relation from what they had accustomed themselves. But it was beginning to start a new train of reflections in the bosoms of each. They were beginning to ask themselves, "Why not?" And, though nothing on the subject had passed between them, yet it is hard telling what might have been the result, but for the happening of the unexpected incident which brings us to the *dénouement* of our little romance in real life.

The voyage of Captain Loton, to which this portion of the tale refers, was commenced about the time of the setting in of the northern winter, in a new ship, with remarkably fine accommodations, which, having become a part owner, he had contrived to have called the "Mary," in compliment to his fair *protégé*, and not without the half-formed, secret expectation, perhaps, that the latter might grace her fine rooms, on her homeward passage, under a new and more endearing title. On his arrival at Havana, he found the city unusually gay and lively, on account of the return of the wealthy from their summer tour to Bermuda, on the American coast, together with the influx of northern strangers, resorting hither at this season, like birds of passage, to escape the rigors of their frosty clime during the dreary months of winter. With the company thus brought together came the usual rounds of popular amusements; among which, the one of the greatest resort by the higher classes, at this time, was the theatre, in which a popular English actor, then on a short sojourn in the island, was performing. And to witness one of his representations, Captain Loton, one evening, was induced to listen to the solicitations of a friend belonging to the city, and attend the theatre with him.

"Here, Loton," said the friend, after they had been seated a few moments, and were glancing over the fashionable assemblage, while waiting for the rising of the curtain, "do you see that lady, in the sky-colored dress, in the box nearly opposite, there, by the column?"

"The lady that is now rising to adjust her shawl? Yes, I do, now; and a finely-turned figure, very, she can boast; don't you call it so?" replied the other, glancing with interest on the object thus pointed out to him.

"Ay, and a no less finely-formed set of features, which, a moment since, were turned full upon us; but, as I jogged you, she dropped her veil over them."

"Who is she?"

"A young widow Grayson, recently from the interior of the island, as an acquaintance, famous for finding out the history of new comers, informed me a night or two ago, after pointing her out to me; and her history is a very singular one."

"Indeed — how so?"

"Why, having become acquainted with a young man of our class — a trader of this city — she privately married him — which soon coming to the ears of her wealthy and aristocratic father, he disinherited her, though an only child, and drove her from home. She then came here, and joined her husband, who, dying soon after, left her, in consequence of the fraud of a partner, wholly destitute, and she has been a dependant on some family in Bermuda, who picked her up here, and in pity took her home with them to that island, where she has remained in exile ever since — a dozen years or more — till a few months ago, when she was recalled to take possession of her fortune, left her by the merest accident, on the sudden death of her father. His will disinheriting her, and giving his property to collateral relations, remained unaltered, it appeared, till last summer; when getting offended with one branch of the legatees, he determined to cut them short. So, sending for his attorney, he directed him to write a new will, which was done, and the instrument made ready for his signature, his daughter being still left out. The old will was then destroyed; and a servant was sent out for witnesses to attest the signing of the new one. But one of those whom the old gentleman had selected for the purpose had been suddenly called away, and it was concluded to defer the execution of the will till the next morning. That night the heartless testator died of an apoplexy, leaving his daughter, that lady, yonder, sole heir to one of the finest estates in Cuba."

The curtain now rose, and though Captain Loton for a while often found his eyes straying towards the fair creature whose history he had just heard, and about whose appearance, as little as he could see of her, there was a certain something that created in his bosom a sort of undefined feeling of interest, which he could not account for himself; yet, as the play went on, his attention gradually became interested in the development of the plot, and at length the object of these reveries passed wholly from his mind, and was not recalled for the remainder of the evening.

The incident, however, though lost sight of through the last part of the performance, and the busy morning with him which followed, was brought fully to his mind during the day by another, as little expected as the first, and more calculated to excite his interest and curiosity. As he was retiring from his dinner table, a black boy put a billet into his hands, and immediately disappeared. Perceiving the superscription to be in a lady's hand, and one that was wholly unknown to him, it was with considerable surprise that he opened the billet, and with much more that he read the neatly-penned but brief contents: —

"Will Captain Loton accept an invitation to sup, at six o'clock this evening, at No. 20 —— Street? By so doing he will afford a lady the desired opportunity of communicating with him on a subject of great interest to her, and not wholly without interest, she trusts, to him.

"Julia G."

"Julia G.," he repeated to himself, after a second time reading the note — "Julia G. — Grayson, the lady at the theatre last night — it will answer for that name — yet what can she know of me, or what want of me? It can't be, and still — but I will go and solve the mystery, come what may of it."

A little reflection, however, tended not a little to abate the romantic interest with which he was first inclined to invest the incident, and caused him to waver in his determination. Neither the house designated, nor any family occupying it, were at all known to him; and so singular were all the circumstances attending this invitation, that he at one time inclined to believe it a hoax — at another he suspected it to be the artifice of some designing person to lead him into difficulty, and would pay no attention to it. But curiosity, and a feeling something like a presentiment that the visit was to terminate happily, at length prevailed; and at the appointed hour he set forth, and proceeded, in a state of doubt and agitation very unusual with his calm temperament, to search out the house in question. In this he soon succeeded; and finding the designated number attached to a dwelling-house, the appearance of which satisfied him of the respectability at least of its occupants, he approached, and, with a beating heart, rang for admittance. A servant appeared, and ushering him through a saloon to the entrance of a large and elegantly furnished parlor, motioned him in, and immediately retired. Captain Loton now advanced a step or two within the threshold; but perceiving no one in the room, and thinking he heard some one in an apartment opening into it, he paused, and was hesitating whether to take a seat here, or pass through to the next room, when a light female figure suddenly darted from behind the door ajar on his left, and throwing her arms around his neck, gave him a lively smack on his cheek, and then springing back a step, and looking up with an air of roguish triumph, burst out into a merry peal of laughter.

"Mary!" exclaimed the captain, throwing a look of the utmost surprise, though not of displeasure, upon his adopted daughter. "This, then, is a plot of your hatching, is it, you incorrigible young rogue?"

"Well, admitting it to be so," laughingly retorted the vivacious girl, "you richly deserve it at my hands, sir, for your neglect. You have not been to see me for almost a whole week."

"I have been up to my ears in business, child."

"And yet my consistent father found time to attend the theatre last night, and to come here this evening, it seems, even on the invitation of a stranger."

"Stranger! — then you did not write that billet after all? But who is that stranger, Mary, whose house you appear to be so much at home in?"

"A new acquaintance."

"Ay — but who?"

"That is the secret," archly replied the girl; "but all in good time — another scene of the plot, as you call it, remains to be developed. Excuse me a moment now, if you please, sir, and you shall soon know the whole," she added, skipping out of the room, and leaving the captain with a bosom fluttering with excited expectation to await her return.

In a few moments the door was thrown open, and she reappeared arm in arm with a lady with the bloom of sixteen added to the ripened countenance of thirty, the rare beauty of which was now charmingly heightened by the sweet embarrassment she was trying to conceal.

"Father," said the happy girl, in a voice tremulous with grateful emotion, "this is Mrs. Grayson, and my own mother."

Captain Loton advanced, and warmly grasping the proffered hand of the fair lady, led her to a seat.

"A more grateful surprise," said the captain, after the parties had measurably recovered their composure — "a more grateful surprise, Mrs. Grayson, could hardly have been devised for me even in fancy."

"Many thanks," replied the lady, with feeling, "many thanks to you, Captain Loton, for this kind assurance in the present, and still more for your noble conduct in affairs of the past, of which I have much to say, but with your leave will defer it to a less agitating moment."

The ice of restraint having now been broken, a pleasant conversation ensued, which soon turned so far on the subject of their present meeting, as to unfold to the captain the circumstances which had brought it about. It appeared that Mrs. Grayson, though she had been several weeks in the city, had never been able to learn any thing of her daughter till the night before. She had identified Captain Loton as soon as he entered the theatre, and his name being mentioned by a lady, a stranger to her, who happened to be in the same box, joined in the conversation, and named the circumstance which she had heard, of an American sea captain of that name having adopted, as a daughter, a child who was picked up by him in the street, who was then living, she believed, with a family in her part of the city. This led to such further inquiries and answers as made Mrs. Grayson acquainted, without revealing her own interest in the subject, with the exact situation of the place where the girl, whom she doubted not to be her child, could be found, and ended in a promise of an introduction to the family. And so promptly did she avail herself of these advantages the next morning, that before noon, the reunion of mother and daughter was so happily effected, and with such confidence in each other, that the latter went home with the former, where the present surprise and meeting were planned and executed in the manner we have described.

Supper was now announced, and Mrs. Grayson led the way to the table, which was loaded with the rarest of delicacies, and which, with a nice appreciation of the circumstances, she had caused to be set for the three only; and never was social board surrounded by hearts possessing a livelier interest in each other, or more capable of imparting and receiving happiness among themselves, than those here assembled on the evening so memorable in their respective destinies.

After the repast was over, they returned to the parlor; when the daughter, after exchanging a look of intelligence with the mother, left the room.

" Now, Captain Loton," said Mrs. G., " I will ask your indulgence while I revert to that dark spot in my checkered life, when, a poor, broken-hearted creature, I met you in the streets of this city; and though I expect not to justify my conduct, yet I hope to offer circumstances which you will consider some extenuation of an act which you must have looked upon as both base and unnatural."

" No, lady," interposed the captain, " not so — I believed you driven to the course you took by misfortunes, that should awaken sympathy rather than censure."

"You judged generously, if not truly, sir, and I shall, with more confidence, give you my little history."

She then proceeded to relate her story as Loton had already heard it, with the addition that, as soon as it was discovered by her landlord that her husband had died without leaving any means for her future support, or even for paying the small debt already contracted, he harshly ordered her to leave the house and seek new quarters; and, by way of justifying himself in his cruel course, he assailed her character, giving out that, though a mother, she had never been a wife. This, she soon found, it was easier to deny than to make the contrary appear by any evidence that would command belief. The clergyman by whom she was privately married was not a permanent resident, and had left the island for parts unknown to her; and the only witness of the marriage had died of the yellow fever a few months after that event; and her own assertions gaining no credit against the studiously-circulated insinuations of her slanderer, she was now turned into the streets in perfect destitution, and, finding every door shut against her among the few acquaintances she had formed in the city, despair took possession of her mind, and she prayed for death to end her sorrows. In this forlorn and distracted condition, she wandered from street to street with her babe in her arms, till utter exhaustion compelled her to seek a place for rest, which she soon found in a corner of a veranda of a large warehouse. Here, unobserved, among the bales of goods which screened her from public view, she hushed her babe to sleep, and for a bed deposited it in the basket containing all that was left unsold of her wardrobe. As she was thus employed, and while she was darkly revolving in her mind the fearful alternatives of suicide or a life of beggary and disgrace, her eye fell on Captain Loton, standing on the opposite side of the street, whom she heard a gentleman near her pointing out by name to another as an American sea captain of many fine qualities; and the sudden thought struck her that she would throw herself on his mercy. But as she approached him, her courage failed her, and she suffered him to pass away without attracting his notice. It was, however, as she thought, her last hope, and she timidly followed him till he turned and took her burden from her hands. She could not even then open to him her wishes, or tell him what the basket contained. And knowing that the truth might the next moment be revealed, and fearing it would bring her a humiliating repulse, she resolved, in her desperation, to throw her child on his benevolence, and hie herself away to some lone spot to die. Accordingly, with a hastily-breathed prayer for her child's safety, and with some directions to him, she scarcely knew what, she passed hurriedly into an alley, and fell down in a swoon at the door of a benevolent lady, by whom she was taken into the house, revived, pitied, retained in the family, and, in a few days, invited to go with them to their home in Bermuda, where she became a permanent resident, and where she once, and once only, had the unspeakable pleasure to learn, accidentally, that her child survived, and had been adopted by him in whose hands she left it.

"This is all I can offer by way of palliation," said the lady, as she concluded her story.

"And what more or better could be offered, dear lady," responded Captain Loton in a frank and cordial manner; "for me it is enough — abundantly enough — to confirm the charitable view of the act which I have ever contended it should receive."

"I am deeply grateful to you, sir," rejoined the other with emotion, "for a construction which few, perhaps, under the circumstances, would have put on my motives and conduct; and for this part of my obligations I feel that I can never sufficiently reward you. But for all the rest I am happy in having it in my power to remunerate you. And now I offer you a pecuniary compensation for all your sacrifices, expenses, and care of my daughter, in such sum as you shall name."

"As to pecuniary reward," observed the captain, "I have never expected any, nor can I think of accepting any. The act of taking charge of and adopting your daughter was, on my part, wholly voluntary; and I have been amply repaid for my protection in the affectionate conduct and interesting society of her whom I have thus far protected, but whom I will now relinquish to a mother's better right."

"I may not deserve the boon, sir," said the lady, "but for one purpose I will accept it. You decline receiving all pecuniary reward; but should a remuneration of another kind be desired by you, and the object be not averse, you have now empowered me to award it."

"You overpower me, fair lady, by your offers, and, especially, by your last flattering suggestion. But have you considered well, and concluded the most wisely, in view of the respective positions in which we three have stood, and now stand, towards each other?"

"Another choice, certainly, if equally acceptable, might be happier for us all," replied the other, with encrimsoning cheek; "but can you expect me, unsought, to give you a further option?"

At that moment of sweet embarrassment, they looked up and beheld Mary standing in the doorway, where she had become an involuntary listener to the latter part of the discourse; and she was on the point of retreating; but on perceiving she was noticed, she came forward, and, blushing even more deeply than her mother, she took a hand of each of the others and joined them together.

"It is better thus," she said, and darted from the room.

Little now remains to be told but what the reader's imagination will readily supply. The fine apartments of the good ship Mary, on her homeward passage, though she was much delayed by the round of fetes and discharge of responsibilities, in which her master had unexpectedly become a principal actor, were indeed graced by the presence of not only one, but two, of the most lovely of females — one with the still unchanged title of daughter, and the other with the still more endearing title of wife, from whom and the deserving son of the ocean who had thus nobly won her hand and fortune are now springing up one of the finest families in New England.

THE

OLD SOLDIER'S STORY.

The following very singular adventure was related by an old soldier of the revolutionary army, who lived, till within a few years, to repeat it over and over at the social firesides of his numerous descendants. Although the incident, on which the story turns, is fraught not slightly with the marvellous, yet, as he was a man whose veracity was unquestioned on other matters, we will give it as he invariably told it, leaving the reader to account for it if he can, as we have often, but always unsuccessfully, tried to do, on natural principles, or else settle down in the opinions which the old soldier himself always entertained — that it was a special interposition of divine Providence to save his life, and the lives of his companions.

"It was in the eventful summer of 1777, when General Burgoyne was pouring the numerous troops of his invading army along the western shores of Lake Champlain, towards the very unequal forces of the Americans at Ticonderoga, and the whole wilderness was resounding with the notes of hostile preparation, that a small party, consisting of myself and three others, were detached from St. Clair's post, to proceed down the lake, as scouts, to watch and report the movements of the approaching enemy. We were fully aware of the perils which we were likely to encounter; for the echoes of the war whoop, which rose from the great feast just given by Burgoyne, and shook the startled wilderness with the congregated yells of two thousand savages, had scarcely died away among the mountains, and parties of their warriors were supposed to be prowling the woods in every direction. We proceeded, therefore, slowly, and with great caution. But all our watchfulness was destined to avail us nothing; for, while sitting round a spring, in one of the deep, woody ravines that run up from the western side of the lake, where we had halted for refreshment, we were surprised by a party of about a dozen French and Indians, and, after a short resistance, in which two of the latter were slain, overpowered and taken prisoners. Our captors, after strongly binding our hands, and placing a guard at the side of each, marched us down to the shore of the lake, where we arrived about sunset. A consultation was now held, which terminated, evidently, in some dissatisfaction on the part of the Indians, though, as we did not understand their language, we were unable to gather the cause, or any thing, indeed, by which we could form a probable conjecture of the destiny that awaited us captives. We were then hurried into a light bateau, which was drawn from a covert of bushes extending into the water; and the ceremony of placing guards at the side of each of us having again taken place, our boat was directed northwardly along the shore, towards the British camp, which I judged to be ten or twelve miles distant. The afternoon had been unusually dark and cloudy, and we had not pursued our course long before one of the blackest nights that I ever knew shut down on the sleeping waters of the lake. Without the interchange of a word, however, our sharp-built little craft was impelled over the waters by the sinewy arms of the natives with great velocity. The oars were occasionally stayed, indeed, and their heads were intently bent down to the surface of the water, for the purpose, probably, both of ascertaining their direction by the different shades between the water and woods, and of listening for any other boats that might be abroad in pursuit. But we could not distinguish land from water, and no sound reached our ears but that of the low, sullen dash of the waves along the shores.

"After having pursued our course through the impenetrable darkness for many miles in this manner, words of sullen tone began to be occasionally interchanged between our French and Indian captors, while the speed of our boat was suffered sensibly to abate. And it was not long before the murmurs of the savages who appeared to claim some right which their white allies refused to grant them assumed the tone of great bitterness, boding to my ears some fatal purpose in the former, unless they were permitted to act as they wished. It is true we understood not a word in their language; but there is something in the human voice which, to those who have noted it for the purpose, will always betray the secret workings of the soul, whatever may be the language of the tongue, or whatever the measures resorted to for concealment.

"The effect of those tones on my feelings, and the presentiment of danger that accompanied them in this instance, I shall never forget, and much less the sight that soon burst on our bewildered vision. After a profound, and to me an ominous silence of some minutes among our captors, a low but sharp and hissing sound was uttered by one of the Indians, in the manner of a signal; when the oars were all at once relinquished, and we could hear a part of the crew hastily clutching some kind of implements, and rising to their feet, and fixing their position for some sudden effort. At this critical instant, a light, at first flashing faintly, and then quickly increasing to the brightness of the noonday sun, broke on our astonished sunset. A boat was passing rapidly by us, which, to our recoiling vision, seemed clothed with fire, and filled with bright figures in the human form, fixing their burning and withering looks on the quaking savages, and pointing on high with uplifted hands. Amazed and appalled as we were at this awful sight, the picture which our boat presented was to us prisoners by no means less startling, telling us, as it at once did, of the destiny that one moment before awaited us. The Indians stood over us with one hand grasping the scalping-knife, and the other drawn back with the tomahawk ready for the fatal blow, while the fiendish looks of the assassins, blending with the hellish smile of anticipated revenge, was deeply depicted on their savage countenances. But a second glance showed an altered expression. Those looks, which so plainly told their infernal purposes, had given way to expressions of convicted guilt and uncontrolled terror. They stood mute and paralyzed with fear and amazement, their eyeballs starting from their heads, and their arms sinking nervelessly by their sides. Sudden as its first appearance, the strange boat vanished from our sight, and we were again left in total darkness. The savages, with convulsive shudders, hastily resumed their seats, and plied their oars with unnatural energy. Not another word or sound was uttered by one of the crew, as our boat was sent surging through the waters, till we struck the shore, and were hailed by a sentinel walking before the British encampment.

"The prisoners, with hearts overflowing with joy and thankfulness at our miraculous escape from death, were then delivered over to a guard, and lodged within the lines. The next day we were shipped, with other prisoners, to St. John, where we remained some months, when it was our good fortune to be exchanged, and consequently be permitted to return to our respective homes."

A NEW WAY
TO COLLECT A BAD DEBT.

Young Hobson, not he of *choice* memory, but John Hobson, a plain, hardy, shrewd Vermont farmer, having, by dint of delving and scrambling among the rugged rocks of his native hills, gathered a respectable share of the solid lucre, began to bethink him, with certain other secret motives, of rising a little faster in the world by way of a spec. For this purpose he laid out his little stock of cash in fat cattle, and purchasing enough more on credit to make out a decentish kind of a drove, as he termed it, took up a line of march with his horned regiment through the long woods to Quebec. After undergoing his full share of fatigue and suffering from swimming rivers and worrying through the mud of ten-mile swamps, sustained only by the meagre fare of French taverns, which but for the name of taverns had been hovels, which a decent farmer in Vermont would have been somewhat ashamed to have housed his hogs in, Hobson arrived safe and sound at the great northern market. He soon had a bid that exceeded his most sanguine expectations, and after receiving from a bystander an assurance of the bidder's pecuniary ability for such a purchase, he struck off the whole lot; while the purchaser, directing him to his lodgings, told him to call the next day, and he should receive his money. Chuckling with the thought of his great bargain, — and in fact the price was a thumping one, — Hobson returned to the inn where he had bespoken quarters, and informed the landlord of his lucky sale.

"To whom did you sell, friend Hobson?" said the landlord.

"Derrick, he called himself, the good-looking man of the market there — "

"And you didn't trust him, man, did you?"

"To be sure I did, till to-morrow, when he promises the money all on the nail; and another tall fellow told me Derrick was good for thousands."

"Bill Derrick," then said the landlord, "and Catch-Gull Luck, his everlasting surety, suppose they have made another haul. It may be as you expect, Mr. Hobson; but this much I will say, if you get your money to-morrow, or *all* of it ever, I will agree to keep Lent twelve months at least."

"But I shall though," said Hobson, "or by the hocus-pocus of my grandmother, I will soon teach him the true cost of cheating a Yankee."

The landlord shook his head, and Hobson retired for the night with his spirits wofully down towards zero; and though he still could not persuade himself but that the man would be punctual, yet he acknowledged to himself that he had been a little too fast among these city folks, in taking every thing for gold that shines, on their own word or the word of an abetter.

The next day Hobson waited on Derrick according to agreement, and was received with all possible politeness by the smooth-tongued dealer; Mr. Hobson was very welcome, but really, he had ten thousand pardons to beg, that in the great hurry he had entirely forgotten to make arrangements to meet his promise; but the man he was to receive the money from, he supposed, would require a day's notice, or so; but he would see him immediately, and by calling again to-morrow, every thing would be regulated to Mr. Hobson's wishes, he presumed. All this, however, Hobson was not quite as ready to take for gospel now as before; and in order that he might know a little better the state in which he stood with this ready promise, he diligently betook himself to making inquiries into the man's situation and character.

From these he soon learnt that Derrick had disposed of the cattle as soon as he had purchased, and that although in reality he might be worth some property, yet his promise was considered good for nothing, for he always contrived to conceal his effects from his creditors, and acting the bankrupt as occasion required, he always put the law at defiance; in fine, that he was an arrant knave, and had before played the same game on several unwary drovers, who, in their eagerness to close a bargain at the great price which he was ever ready to offer, had neglected the precaution of making inquiries, and sold their cattle to him on a short credit, and, after being amused and dallied by his promises a few weeks, had given up their debts as lost, and gone off in despair. "So ho, John," said our hero, soliloquizing along as he trudged back to his lodgings, with the feelings of one whose own folly had made him the dupe of a knave, and whose anger is so nearly balanced between himself, for his own stupidity, and him who had taken advantage of it by an act of baseness, that he is perfectly at a loss on which he shall give vent to his laboring resentment — "so, ho! John, then it seems you're bit. Yes, I, John Hobson, who about home was thought to be up to any thing for a bargain — who outwitted old Clenchfist the shave, and Screwfast the pettifogger — I, John Hobson, am bit, cursedly bit, like a great gull as I am, by this palavering quintessence of a pack of d—d rascals! It's a good one, though, by the pipers, if it an't!"

The next day Hobson renewed his visit to Derrick, with no better success than before. The next, and the next, it was put off with some new and ingenious excuse, and his hopes excited with a fresh promise of payment, till he entirely lost all faith in the fellow's promises. What must be done? He could never go back and face his neighbors in Vermont, of whom he had purchased part of his drove on credit till he returned, without the money to pay them; besides, nearly all his own property was vested in the drove. "Yes," said he to himself, something must be done to get me out of this dilemma. So now, John Hobson, for your wits; and let them be stretched to their prettiest." With this view of his case he sought the landlord.

"Is this evil genius of mine, this Derrick," said he, "at all tinctured with notions of a religious or superstitious nature?"

"No; as it regards a future reckoning, he neither fears God nor devil."

"Well, then, does he wish to be thought a man of honor and honesty with any of the big fishes of your city?"

"No; he has nothing to hope from them, nor does he care what they think of him."

"And what say you of his courage? Can he face?"

"No; he is said to be a great coward, and always a sneak from danger."

"Ah, that is something!" said Hobson. "Hold easy, and say nothing."

Our hero now mused a while, and retired to bed with a brightened look and the air of one who has got a new maggot in his head, as he probably would have himself expressed it. The next morning he was stirring as soon as it was light. Sallying out into the town, he soon came across a couple of Indians lazily lounging about the street."

"Sawnies, or whatever they call ye," says he, "I want to hire you to day."

"Me go," said the spokesman of the two; "me go for de money or de rum."

"Well, then, do you know Derrick there about the market, with a white coat and a black cane?"

"Me know him."

"Very well, I will give you a broad shiner apiece if you will dog that fellow until bedtime. Don't touch him, or say one word to him, but always keep your eyes on him; if he turns a corner, you turn too; if he goes into a house, you watch till he comes out; and if he comes near you, run till he stops, and then turn and watch again. Will you do it?"

"Yes; me do him," was the reply.

Hobson now returned to his lodgings, and remained there till night, when he set out for Derrick's, to see if his plan of operations had produced any effect; and if so, to give it such a turn as he might think best calculated to accomplish his purpose.

Derrick was at home, and obviously in no very cheerful mood. After framing his usual excuses for not having the money ready, he soon fell into a sort of reverie. Hobson now began to have some hopes that his scheme would succeed; and while he was endeavoring by various questions to draw out something which would open a way for him to act his own part in the plan, Derrick observed, —

"I have noticed a rather mysterious circumstance to-day, Mr. Hobson; a thing I can't exactly account for."

"What may that be," said Hobson, "if I may be so bold with your honor?"

"Why, there have been a couple of Indians dogging and spying me out in every spot and place I have been in since morning. I tried to come up with them once or twice, and they vanished like apparitions; but as soon as I turned, I could see them peeping out after me from some other place. They kept at a distance, to be sure; but they looked d—d evil, and I don't know exactly what it all means."

"It *is* quite singular," said Hobson; "but what kind of looking fellows were they?"

Derrick described them.

"Why, sir," said Hobson, "they must be the very fellows that helped me with my cattle through the long woods. I am rather sorry that I employed them, for I begin to suspect they are desperate and bloody-minded fellows; though they stuck to me as close as brothers on the way, and I should have paid them, but I told them I could not until you paid me for the cattle; then I mean to pay them well, and get rid of them, for they begin to look rather askew at me, and I confess, between you and I, that I feel rather shy of the imps myself. But I believe I must be jogging; you say I may call to-morrow?"

"Yes—yes, certainly," said Derrick.

Hobson retired, and signing to the Indians, who were lurking round the house, to follow him, he took them aside.

"Well, my lads, you have done well—here are your wheels; go and drink, then come back to your business. Be seen once or twice more to-night, and be at your post early to-morrow morning, and keep up the same game till to-morrow night. Here are another pair of shiners for you—will you do it?"

"Yes; me do him," was again the laconic answer.

The next day Hobson again waited on Derrick, and found him looking extremely ill and haggard, with the appearance of one who had been sadly disturbed of his rest.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Hobson," said he; "I am very happy at length to be able to pay you; but you must be sensible, Mr. Hobson, that the sum I promised you for your cattle was a hundred dollars over the market price. I made a losing go of it; and I think that you will discount the hundred dollars, at least."

"I fear that cannot be," said Hobson; "for I have already made a contract to pay away all this money before I leave the city, except enough to pay my expenses home and pay off the bloody Indians; perhaps I could get away, however, by dodging the knaves—could I not?"

"O, no," said Derrick eagerly. "No, for Heaven's sake, no; pay them well. Why, last night, they waylaid my house, and have been seen several times this morning, though I have been so unwell that I have not been out to-day; not that I fear them, Mr. Hobson, but on your own account pay them off to the last farthing, for otherwise, depend on it, they will do you some cursed mischief. I was only in jest about the discount."

With this Derrick brought out a bag of gold, and, without further ceremony, counted out the full sum to the inwardly-exulting Hobson, who, pocketing the guineas with great composure, bid Derrick good morning, and marched off in triumph to his lodgings, and, recounting his good fortune to his admiring landlord, took a hearty breakfast, and departed, having good-naturedly absolved the landlord from his promise of perpetual secret, and leaving the Indians to earn their day's wages to the sad discomfiture of the nerves of poor Derrick. In two hours Hobson had crossed the great river on his way homeward, and pronouncing his parting blessing on the walled city, "And you didn't nab John Hobson, after all," said he, turning his head and spurring his pony into a round trot up the great road towards the States; "you didn't nab him so easily, ye mongrel, scurvy, rascallious crew of beef-eating John Bulls, and *parley vou francez* frigazee, frog-eating Frenchmen. So leaving this specimen of Vermont fashions, in turning the tables on a rascal for your benefit, good-by, says I, and be hanged to you!"

It was about a month after the occurrences we have described, that a gay wedding party was assembled at the house of Esquire ——, at the Four Corners, in Slab City. The balance that had been, for more than a year, doubtfully trembling at equipoise between our young farmer and a more wealthy but a less-loved suitor of the squire's fair daughter, had at length turned in favor of our hero, who always attributed his subsequent happiness to his lucky speculation at the walled city.

AN

INDIAN'S REVENGE.

SOME twenty-five or thirty years ago, circumstances made me, for a few days, an inmate of a family situated in the heart of the Green Mountains. It was the family of a hardy young farmer, who, with a wife, young, active, and ambitious as himself, had, a few years before, made his pitch on a lot of wild land, and was now, by the steady efforts of his industry, rapidly transforming the patch of brown wilderness, which he had selected as his home, into a cultivated field. It was now the night of a beautiful summer's day, and the sun was slowly sinking behind the woody hills which, deeply environing the log-house and the little opening around it, stood clothed in all the green majesty of nature, sending forth on the fine atmosphere, cooled and moistened by the evaporating spray of a thousand falling rills, their sweet and healing breath, impregnated with all the blooming fragrance of the blooming wilderness. The farmer had returned from his labor in the field, and was silently pacing the room with an air of dejection and pensiveness. He gave no reason for this change in his deportment, and remained silent until he was kindly interrogated by his wife.

"I know not how it is, Rebecca, but I have felt this day a sensation of uncommon uneasiness, rather of mind than of body, I believe — the same unaccountable feeling that I have always experienced when some hidden danger was lurking about me."

"I think it all your own fancyings," replied she, with some apparent concern. "My husband," she continued, turning to me with the air of one who seems to consider some explanation called for by the circumstances — "my husband is a little subject, at times, to dark and moody turns, and often starts at imaginary dangers, while real ones appear to be the least of his concern."

While she was speaking, the husband had approached the side of the house, and was intently looking through a large crevice between the logs, from which the moss — a substance in common use to stop the crevices of log buildings — had been partly removed. In a moment he started back, with a look of dismay, seized his rifle from the wooden hooks by which it was suspended from a beam above him, and instantly cocked it.

"Rebecca," said he, in a hurried tone, "come here."

She tremblingly obeyed, and looked through the crevice in the direction of his quivering finger. She instantly recoiled from the view. Her husband was now in the attitude of raising the muzzle of the piece to the crevice. Seizing it with both hands, "You cannot be so thoughtless," said she, "as to fire upon them. O, fly — fly out of the other window, and you can reach the woods unseen!"

The husband, pausing a moment, and giving a quick glance in every direction around him, replied, "You are right;" while she, as if reading at a look his wishes, reached his powder horn and ball pouch, and was hurrying him to the window. As he passed me, he said,—

"Stay here and protect my family till I return, and all but life shall reward you."

He then threw himself out of the window, and bowing almost to the ground, and sometimes creeping, he pursued his way hastily through the weeds and bushes that bordered a small rivulet, till he reached the woods and disappeared.

"There," said she, drawing her suspended breath, "thank Heaven, he is safe!"

Amazed at what I had witnessed, I hastily asked for an explanation. Convulsively seizing my arm, she conducted me to the crevice.

"Look beneath yonder clump of trees," said she.

I did so, and, to my surprise, I beheld three Indians, apparently holding a consultation and watching the house. They were armed with rifles, tomahawks, cords, and such other implements as their warriors are known to carry when on expeditions of massacre or capture.

"There, sir, is the cause of our fears. We have before been alarmed in this manner; but my husband then, as he has now, providentially escaped them. Had he been seen here, it would, probably, have been their endeavor to have taken him to-night, and carried him off to their tribe, to murder him after their own fashion; or, had they failed in this, they would have ambushed and shot him. But now they have not seen him, they will watch for a day or two, and depart as noiselessly as they came."

I expressed some doubts of their hostile intentions, and suggested the improbability that they would here dare to seek the life of an individual, since the country had become so far settled, that, on the least alarm, a force could soon be rallied sufficient to exterminate the whole tribe.

"My husband," said she, "was formerly a hunter on the lakes, and he then, innocently, was the cause of an accident which terminated fatally to an Indian, and which, it seems, they think he can only atone for with his life. Though they pass peaceably through the country, and as yet have committed no violence, still my husband too well knows their deadly purpose. How they have discovered his present residence is still unknown to him. But I choose that he should tell his own story. Stay with us over to-morrow; they will depart, and he will return."

I consented. The Indians, after reconnoitring the house from different positions, disappeared for the night. They repeated the same several times the next day, when, towards night, they disappeared, and were soon heard of several miles off, making their way northward. The farmer returned the next day, when he related the following adventure of his early days:—

"Several years ago, I made an excursion to Lake Memphremagog for the purpose of spending the fall in hunting and catching furs around the shores of that lake, which is now associated with recollections which I fear will always be fatal to my happiness. I had been there several weeks, when one day, being out in quest of a deer which my dog had started, I heard the report of a rifle at some distance, and pursuing my way in the direction of the sound, I soon came across an Indian who lay wounded and bleeding on the ground. From appearances, as well as his signs, I learnt that, being in the range of the game and his companions, he had been wounded by the ball from one of their rifles, and that they, unconscious of what they had done, had pursued the chase, and left him in this condition, fainting from the loss of blood. I stanched his wound the best way I could, revived and conveyed him to my tent. The wound was not dangerous, and, in a few days, during which I paid all the attention in my power, he was enabled to depart to his tribe, who were encamped round the other end of the lake. After this, he frequently visited my tent, bringing me game and taking various ways to express his gratitude, spending considerable time with me, and often joining me in hunting excursions. I soon became much attached to him, and repaid his kindness with many little presents of various kinds of trinkets which I had brought with me. This probably awakened the jealousy of his companions, as I afterwards noticed an uncommon coolness and reserve in their manner towards me when I met them. While matters continued thus, one night, as I lay in my tent, I was awakened by a furious barking of my dog. The terrified animal, by his unnatural cries, and the manner in which he ventured forth and frequently retreated back into the door of my tent, told me that no common animal was near me. I arose, renewed the priming of my gun, and looked out in the direction where the attention of the dog was confined. At length my sight was caught by two hideously glaring eyeballs that were beaming out from the boughs of a thick pine that stood but eight or ten rods from my tent. I at once knew it to be an enormous catamount. And judging, from the motions of the animal, that he was about to leap towards me, I resolved to hazard a shot, although sensible of the uncertainty of my aim in the dark. I accordingly levelled my piece, and carefully directing my aim between the two bright orbs that were glowing down upon me with the intenseness of a furnace, I fired, and the animal, with a tremendous leap and a scream that echoed for miles among the mountains of the lake, fell to the ground about half way from the tree to where I stood. My dog still refusing to approach the spot, and knowing the animal to be dangerous, even with the last gasp of life, I hastily reloaded for another fire. At this moment I heard a rustling among the bushes, and discerning some dark object to move in the direction of the animal, and supposing he was preparing for another leap, I fired, something fell to the ground, and my blood curdled as I heard the sounds of the human voice in the hollow groan that accompanied the fall. I hastened to the spot; the lifeless body of the catamount lay upon the ground; and a little farther, I beheld a human being writhing in the agonies of death. I applied a torchlight to his face, and, to my unutterable grief, discovered him to be my Indian friend. Having been belated on an excursion, he was probably approachtring the tent for the night at the time I was reconnoitring the catamount; and having seen him fall, he was cautiously approaching the animal when arrested by my fatal shot, which it was my luckless destiny to give him. Though unable to speak, a fierce and vengeful expression was beaming in his eyes, as he beheld me. In a moment, however, as if satisfied of the innocence of my motives, on witnessing the agony of my feelings, his countenance assumed a mild and benignant expression. He stretched out his hand to receive mine; and with this last convulsive effort of appeased and friendly feeling, he immediately expired. I soon began to feel sensible of the peculiar difficulties and dangers of my situation. If I should call in the Indians, I doubted greatly whether I should be able to prevent them from suspecting me of intentionally killing their companion; and such suspicions, I feared, would be fostered by some of the tribe in their present feelings towards me. And as suspicion, in the creed of the Indian, is but little better than conviction, and fearful of the fiery tortures that must follow such a conclusion in their minds, I concluded, perhaps unwisely, to dispose of the body secretly. With this determination, I took the rifle and several steel traps which the deceased had with him, and lashing them to the body, conveyed it to my canoe, and rowed to the deepest part of the lake. I shall never forget the painful and gloomy feeling that attended the performances of this sad and fearful office. Though conscious of my innocence, and of being only dictated by prudence in thus disposing of him to whom I could have wished an honorable interment, still a kind of guilty feeling and self-condemnation weighed deeply on my mind. Even the murmuring winds that were sighing mournfully through the tall pines that stood towering along the shores of the lake, seemed to upbraid me; and the low wailings of the waves, dashing sullenly on the distant beach, seemed to fall on my ear in the sounds of reproach for the deed I was committing; dark presentiments of approaching danger oppressed and sunk gloomily on my spirits. On arriving into the deep waters of the lake, I lifted the body over the side of the canoe into the water, and it immediately sunk, by the weight of iron by which it was encumbered, and disappeared from my sight. I then turned and rowed back hastily to the shore. As I was about to step out of my canoe, I heard the plash of an oar at a distance down the lake. This circumstance, though I could discern nothing, much alarmed me, as I supposed the Indians were abroad on the lake, and had probably observed my movement — in which case I feared that a discovery was inevitable; for though they must be perfectly ignorant of my business at the time, yet on missing their companion, they would be sure to revolve this circumstance in their minds, in every bearing, and perhaps, with some ingenious conclusion, connect it with his fate; for there are no people who can vie with the natives of our forests in the scrutinizing closeness of their observations, the minuteness and accuracy of comparing circumstances, and the faculty of drawing conclusions from presumptive evidence. I returned to my tent and lay down — but not to sleep. Alone, in a dark wilderness, many miles from the dwelling of a civilized being, and deprived of my only friend by the very blow that had brought me into the situation where he was the most needed — the gloomy stillness of the house, and the dark forebodings of the future, rushed on my mind, and conspired to fill my bosom with feelings of grief, anxiety, and utter loneliness.

"The next day I went out, and was absent nearly all day. As I was returning, when I came in sight of my tent, I saw two Indians intently examining the spot where the deceased had fallen. They then took the trail I had made in carrying the body to the lake, carefully noticing each leaf on the way till they reached the canoe, and, after looking at it minutely a while, they raised a kind of wailing whoop, and departed towards their encampment. Judging from their appearance that they had formed conclusions unfavorable to me, I packed up my most valuable furs and other articles, and building a good fire at the door of the tent, I took a bear skin and lay down in a thicket at a distance, from which I could see directly into the tent. During the evening, several Indians appeared around the tent, and finally entered it. Finding my movables gone, they immediately raised the war whoop, and scattered in every direction. One came near me, pursuing his way down the lake. I remained a while, then rose, and, taking my pack, directed my course to the south end of the lake, from whence I intended to steer to the nearest white settlement. I reached the place before day unmolested, and sought a concealment in an old tree top on the ground, where I lay still till nearly dark the next day. I then rose, and was making my way homeward, when two Indians rose from a thicket, and rushed upon me. I ran for the shore of the lake, which I had not yet left, and reached it as the Indians were within two rods of me. It was a precipice of rocks hanging perpendicularly fifty feet above the waters. I must be taken or leap the rock. I paused an instant, plunged headlong, and was quickly buried in the deep waters beneath. When I arose, I saw my faithful dog, who had followed the desperate fortunes of his master, floating apparently lifeless on the surface, having so flatly struck the water in his fall that the shock had deprived him of breath and the power of motion. With as little of my head above water as possible, I swam under the shelving rocks, so as to get out of the view of the Indians. Several balls were in quick succession sent into the body of the unconscious dog, it being now so dark the Indians could not distinguish it from me. Supposing they had done their bloody work, they ran up the lake, where they could get down to the water, to swim in after what they mistook to be my body. While doing this I had swam in an opposite direction, till, unseen, having effected a landing, I took my course with rapid strides towards the settlements, and had proceeded some distance before I heard the whoop which told the disappointment of the Indians. I, however, travelled all night unmolested, and the next day at noon was safely lodged in the house of an old acquaintance."

After the narrator had concluded his story, I partook of some refreshment, and soon took my leave of the family. Several years after, I was journeying through the town, and passed by the same dwelling. It was desolate and tenantless, and the weeds and bushes had grown up where I had before seen fields of waving grain. On inquiry, I learnt that the former occupant, having again been haunted by the Indians, and perhaps still more by his own imagination, had removed into the western country, without informing even his nearest neighbors of his intended residence.

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